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By the Rev.
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Author of
"The Blind Spot," "Education of the Heart," "The Bane and the Antidote," Etc.

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I

THE SURPRISES OF THE JUDGMENT

Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee?—MATT. XXV. 37–39.

THE righteous feel that some mistake has been made; they recall no such distinguished opportunities, they are sure that they never rendered any such splendid service, and they feel altogether undeserving of such eulogy and reward. Nevertheless, the recognition and reward are true; their action in life had a breadth and grandeur which they themselves did not suspect. The Judge has made no mistake; He discerns and

recompenses the hidden greatness of obscure life and trivial deeds. It is pleasant to think that the day of doom will bring this relieving aspect. The common idea of the final day is that it will be wholly one of conviction and humiliation. No doubt it will carry enough of sadness; but we must not overlook the fact that many will be startled in the great assize at the revelation of the hidden worth of their apparently insignificant lives —one of the many delightful surprises that the generous King reserves for His lowly yet faithful children.

The unconsciousness of genius is a subject that has often been treated. Columbus never knew that he discovered America; he died without any idea that he was the grand pioneer we now know him. It was years before it dawned upon geographers that a new, vast continent had been found. What would he think of his discovery now? Some of the greatest painters would be immensely astonished if they could revisit the earth, and find that pictures painted by them in poverty and sold for a few shillings are the masterpieces of famous galleries. Many inventors and discoverers never understood the significance of their experiments: for instance, Franklin had not the least idea that his kite was a sign in the heavens betokening a new age. And Emerson

sings beautifully touching one of the greatest of artists:

> The hand that rounded Peter's dome,
> And groined the aisles of Christian Rome,
> Wrought in a sad sincerity:
> Himself from God he could not free;
> *He builded better than he knew:*
> The conscious stone to beauty grew.

There is an unconsciousness of goodness as there is an unconsciousness of genius. Good men are usually unaware of all that their actions imply and to what they lead. Everything done by them seems trivial beyond expression so far as it meets their eye and the eye of others. They have to do with "the least of these." The situation they hold is known as "a poor job." Their contributions to various causes are never large enough to get a line to themselves, and are ignominiously lumped with "small sums." They are generally spoken of as being people "without influence." In fact, they are "lumped" in everything; throughout life they are merged in the insipid million. And so thousands of noble people see only the meagre aspect of their circumstances, and they live and die without having once felt the intrinsic and the relative greatness of what they were and of what they did. Indeed, we hardly know more of the essential grandeur of our human

life, of the significance of our services, gifts, sufferings, and influence, than the oyster in the dark gulf knows of the precious pearl it secretes, or the coral worm the magnificent island it slowly builds out of the depths of the sea.

We fail to apprehend the great principles expressed in small deeds. The material or social measure of an act may be trifling, whilst the motive which prompted it, the principle which underlies it, and the consequences which follow it may be sublime. We look chiefly at the social and material measure, which is the accident: Christ looks at that which is of the essence. When we take our walks in nature, many large and magnificent objects strike the eye; they cannot be overlooked, they are so considerable and splendid: but the scientist observes minute creatures, shells, and mosses, things which altogether escape the naked eye; he takes these home with him, magnifies them, throws them on the screen, and microscopic life and vegetation are seen to rival in elegance, loveliness, and richness the most exquisite and gorgeous objects of sky and landscape; the minute contents of a drop of water in finish and splendour match the star and flower, the butterfly, bird, and rainbow. Size is the merest accident, the vast and the minute are kindred in glory and worth. We may be sure that it is the same with

the doings of human life. Our actions are petty, obscure, microscopic, unnoticed in the doing, and when done instantly forgotten. Everybody can see the charity of Peabody in the immense blocks of building which he erected for the poor; everybody hears from fame's golden trumpet of the magnanimity of Shaftesbury; he that runs may read on the page of history of memorable deeds of justice, honour, and humanity: but the duties, offerings, and sacrifices which make up the life of the multitude absolutely lack emblazonment or distinction. The fierce light of the last day will, however, reveal these hidden things of insignificance, and picture them in large characters on the great white throne, as minute life is disclosed on the screen of the naturalist. Then it will be seen that the bald and contemptible things of humble life are one with historic and immortal achievements. In that day multitudes of lowly souls will learn with unutterable wonder of the breadth, seriousness, and glory of actions which once appeared so small; they will look upon the revelation of themselves with a delighted surprise, as we might suppose the microscopic creatures would do if they could see their transfigured forms in the magic of the lantern.

We do not see the immense importance of a small part well played. We are chiefly struck by

the great positions and by those who occupy them. We estimate ourselves lightly, as we do all others who "fill a little space." Irving, the theatrical authority, is said to attach the greatest importance to the performance of small parts in his pieces. He is reported as saying, "I can get anybody to play good parts; but it is a very difficult thing to get an actor to play small parts as I wish to see them played." He insists on the special importance of these small parts and the extraordinary difficulty there often is in effectually sustaining them. The ambitious aspire to figure as Othello, Lear, Hamlet, Romeo, and so forth. He has no difficulty to find men willing to take principal characters, and of these leading actors the public talk; the critic, however, is aware how much the unnoted, silent player of a subordinate part contributes to the perfection and power of dramatic representation. His part is essential and difficult, and if badly executed mars the most brilliant performance. Is not this exactly so in human life? We talk of the great actors in the drama of life—statesmen, philosophers, captains, millionaires; but God knows the immense importance of the small parts, and He knows the high qualities necessary to the successful carrying of them out. What patience the small part demands! What strength to sustain it uncomplainingly! What resignation

to work without friction within such narrow limits! What heroism to utterly subordinate oneself whilst others loom large in the front! What faith to keep on through the weary years without a cheer! No test of character is more severe than a small part. The Master knows all this more perfectly than it is possible for us to know it, and He will in the decisive day reward most handsomely the great actors who have played so well the small parts. They shall have a cheer then to atone for the chilling silence now. He who has been faithful in that which is least shall justly take his place with the illustrious ones who have been faithful in much, for he is worthy. Dr. Carpenter once sent to Sir Charles Lyell the copy of a monograph that he had written on an obscure specimen of natural history, and in doing so he sent a sort of apology for having tried to make so much out of what might be thought a small and trivial subject. The great geologist replied, "Any single point is really the universe." Let us remember this in life—any single point is really the universe. When one vital fact is thoroughly known, all is known; when one duty is well done, the whole range of obedience is fulfilled. We are faithful in that which is least, and Omniscience sees in the small and trivial thing so bravely, loyally wrought the potentiality of highest and completest service.

We do not know the far-reaching influence of small acts. We perform a deed of simple honesty, justice, pity, helpfulness, and straightway forget it; we do not think of the mustard-tree that is to grow out of the smallest of seeds. It is said that the fuchsia was introduced into this country by a sailor boy, who brought it from a foreign clime as a present for his mother; she exposed it in her modest window, it became an attraction, and that plant pioneered all the fuchsias of the country. How little that sailor boy knew what he was doing! He did far more than he thought. He has gladdened thousands of eyes and hearts. If he could come back to-day and see his plant blooming on the window-sills of the poor, in the gardens of the rich, in the conservatories of connoisseurs, how surprised and gladdened he would be! If he is a public benefactor who makes two blades of grass grow where only one grew before, what shall be said of him who makes a million plants bloom where not one bloomed before? So we perform nameless acts of kindness, forbearance, and equity, we speak fugitive words of truthfulness and courtesy, and these have a self-propagating power and go on reproducing themselves in endless harvests. How much good to the race shall spring out of the little fidelities and humanities which make up the life of the ordinary good man, who shall say?

Lord Byron awoke one morning and found himself famous; let us do our little task with all our heart, and we too, unknown to-day, shall wake up in the morning satisfied and wondering at the large meanings and consequences of a short life.

With aching hands and bleeding feet
  We dig and heap, lay stone on stone;
We bear the burden and the heat
  Of the long day, and wish 'twere done
Not till the hours of light return,
All we have built do we discern.

II

SELF-EXAMINATION

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?—2 Cor. xiii. 5.

Without doubt these words have been greatly misunderstood, and grievous harm has resulted from their misinterpretation. Some of the Corinthians denied the reality of St. Paul's apostolic calling and character, and in the text he says to these unfriendly critics: Examine yourselves, and in the reality of your own spiritual life, which was derived through my ministry, you shall best prove the genuineness of my Christian character and the authority of my position in the Christian Church. If you are true Christians, my ministry is vindicated; you can discredit my authority only by proving yourselves to be reprobates. But this verse has been made to sanction a doctrine of morbid self-scrutiny utterly at variance with the healthiness and reasonableness of the New Testament. The doctrine of self-examination has, on the whole, been a very melan-

choly one. It is painful to think of the infinite self-torture of many sincere but misguided souls, alike in mediæval and modern times. The history of self-examination is a history of days and years blighted by morbid introspection and disheartening analyses of thoughts, feelings, and acts. Narcissus, enamoured of his own beautiful image reflected in the silvery fountain, was changed into a flower; but what toadstool kind of transformation is likely to follow persistent brooding over the vision of sin disclosed in the turbid depths of our own heart? It will pay us better to look up at a fairer vision. Self-vivisection is one of the worst forms of that illegal science.

Still, self-acquaintance is a duty—a duty to be performed in a wise spirit, and we ought from time to time to assure ourselves of our heart, our character, and our walk. Southey relates concerning a nun who escaped from a nunnery in Lisbon that the first thing she inquired for on arriving at the house in which she was to be secreted was a looking-glass. for many years she had not seen her own face. That curiosity we all understand. And surely it is reasonable that we should know the features of our soul; without doubt it is as rational and helpful to look into the glass of a perfect law as to survey our face in the mirror.

"Examine yourselves": *not your neighbours.* The

Corinthians had been busy in their criticisms on the apostle; he asks them for a while to turn the keen investigation upon themselves. To judge our neighbour is a pleasure that rarely palls; but self demands attention as well as society. One of the Puritans says, "The windows of the soul should be like the windows of Solomon's temple, 'broad inward.'" We are to watch ourselves, to judge ourselves, to condemn ourselves, far more severely than we do the Church or the world.

"Examine yourselves": *do not confuse yourself with others.* "Prove your *own* selves." The other day I saw two lads weighing themselves on a weighing-machine; they put the penny into the slot, and together got upon the scale. They thought to defraud the proprietor of the machine by their cleverness, two occupying the scale intended for one. The result must have been very unsatisfactory to the astute youths. They knew their aggregate weight, but neither of them knew his personal weight. Their cleverness defeated itself, as cleverness so often does. What they scaled together was clear enough, whatever value such knowledge might have; their individual weight, however, was as great a problem as ever. As I watched the lads it struck me that in making our moral estimates we sometimes fall into a similar fallacy. We do not detach ourselves and seek to ascertain our personal

merit; we ingeniously confuse ourselves with others: we are sons and daughters of parents who have passed into the skies; we recall the happy and distinguished associations and friendships of past years; we are linked with a devout husband or wife; our children have arisen to honour; in the Church we are numbered with the saints. We do not isolate ourselves and prove our own selves; we identify ourselves with others with whom we happen to be associated. Let us avoid this snare. Such confused estimates are little worth. We shall at last be weighed in the balances one by one, so had better weigh ourselves that way now.

"Examine yourselves": *know your real selves, not your seeming selves.* We sometimes fancy that we know ourselves, when in fact we know only our seeming selves. The Chinese are said to be fondest of that dress which most effectually conceals their true figure; and by a variety of sophistries we hide our real selves from ourselves. "Their inward thought is——" Yes, that is what we want to get at—the inward thought, the hidden man of the heart. Strictly examined, our virtues may turn out to be no virtues at all. Zeal keenly tested proves to be temper, charity reveals itself as vain-gloriousness, economy is disguised covetousness, courage is presumption, honesty is expediency with a fine name, conscientiousness is only the subtle

working of self-will, contentment is really sloth, and amiability an easy-going disposition that lets things slide. We must not be content to note the surface. God will try us and our work by fire that He may show of what sort it is; and we ought to apply to ourselves very closely the eternal tests of truth and righteousness. Let us seek to know ourselves as we are known of God.

"Examine yourselves": *your present selves, not your old selves.* It is rather a common thing to judge ourselves by what we knew and felt and did in past years. Yet we may have been right then, and now have ceased altogether to be so. A disastrous change has taken place, and taken place so gradually that we have failed to note it. Swedenborg says that physical dying is sometimes so easy a process that he met with people in the spiritual universe who did not know that they were dead until he called their attention to the fact. However this may be, it is unquestionable that the divine life can ebb away silently and imperceptibly. Little by little the selfish, the worldly, the pleasant, and the profitable destroy the spirituality of our life and service. We may have a name to live when our profession is merely a shroud and when Christ has wept over us far bitterer tears than He wept over Lazarus. Are we converted men and women now? Is the divine fire burning still? Are our

prayers availing to-day? Are our last works more than the first? These are the questions.

"Examine yourselves": *no one else can do it.* The ecclesiastic insists that the priest must examine us: he must put searching questions, drawing out the secrets of the soul; he must receive our confession and absolve us. Keble writes to a young man: "I think you had better begin immediately to prepare for what is called general confession by reviewing your whole history, and setting down your sins as well as you can. And, having this paper by you, you may add to it from time to time, as new faults occur or old ones are remembered; and then, when a good opportunity comes, you may pour it all out into your loving Lord's ear, through one of His unworthy priests, and be by Him, through the priest's mouth, so fully absolved, that the sins, if not returned to, shall be no more mentioned unto you." How false is it all! "Examine *yourselves*" in the face of God, in the light of His word, at His mercy-seat. He tries the heart; to Him we open our grief; He absolves. "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret." The most abominable sacrilege is not that of the thief breaking into a church and stealing the communion-plate; that sacrilege is perpetrated when one profanes the

closed door within which the penitent talks with God.

The grand test in self-examination is this: "Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" One of the great perversions of the duty of self-examination is that we make it more a quest for the evil in us than a quest for the good. The miner does not look for the dust and dirt of the mine; he watches for the streak of gold. And we must not search our heart for the beast and the devil, but for the manifestations of the indwelling Christ. Have we the love of Christ in our heart? Does our disposition breathe the spirit of Christ? Is the image of Christ revealed in our character? Do we walk as Jesus walked below? The everlasting thought of sin will not save us: the vision of Jesus ever more clearly revealed in our heart saves to the uttermost. If Christ is not in us, He waits at our heart's door; if He is in us, we are gold of the sanctuary becoming purer with each day.

III

THE BRINK OF FAILURE

When I said, My foot slippeth; Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.—Ps. xciv. 18.

All men of aspiration are acquainted with the brink of failure, the spiritual man most of all. He who was the greatest and noblest of our race came nearest the verge of absolute and awful disaster. The Cross marked the extreme, outermost edge of the brink of failure. And yet from that coign of disadvantage spring the glories and triumphs of Christianity. It is so strong and victorious because its Author trembled, bled, cried, swooned, and died. Speaking after the manner of men, Christ came the nearest of all mighty spirits to utter and irretrievable breakdown in the awful dereliction and jeopardy of Calvary; but, crucified through weakness, He liveth by the power of God, and we by Him.

The Christian life, full as it is of high and bold speculation, is most familiar with the consciousness of possible and terrible defeat and failure. That

life begins in the sense of helplessness and hopelessness. Most Christians once found themselves reduced to desperate straits; they saw nothing between themselves and ruin; they were on the point of losing heart and hope. The penitent is sinking in the flood for the third and last time, when He who walks the wave stretches out a saving hand. The brand is already kindled when it is plucked from the burning. When we feel that we are losing life we find it. The sense of deep failure, of almost hopeless failure, seems to be the necessary condition of all high excellence; and it is out of pathetic humiliations and baffled strivings that the regenerate life springs. How near the chrysalis seems to come to the dust of death, and yet it is just there and then that the sylph awakes! The shining saint is born of the consciously undone sinner. The brink of the gulf of despair is the verge of heaven.

The Christian life is largely worked out with the sense of suspense and failure. The righteous often know themselves "scarcely saved." Secular success, even with the greatest men, comes almost always perilously near to failure. Says Mr. Harry Quilter, "An accomplished artist said to me once, 'No picture is worth anything till it has been spoiled three times'; and it is true, I think, that what makes any given picture great is gathered

from the very brink of failure." So the artist proceeds with his task in alternate moods of inspiration and dejection, now striking the line of beauty and anon marring it with infelicitous touch, sometimes grasping the ideal only to drop again into commonplace; and if at last a great picture is achieved, the artist knows that what makes the masterpiece has been gathered from the very brink of failure. "Spoiled three times" before it "is worth anything." How many times are Christian men consciously spoiled in the making? Not three times merely, but rather seventy times seven. That which makes the saint great is gathered from the very brink of failure.

A great lesson is here, and genuine consolation for all Christian men and women. How often are we chilled with a dreary sense of failure, our prayers seeming ineffectual, our endeavours fruitless, our long and painful strivings to fall short of the goal! But we must remember that all grand aspiration involves experiences of discouragement, amazement, and acute apprehension; and yet that the dawn is nearest when the night is darkest, the victory most assured when the exhausted warrior sinks on his knees. In the sense of helplessness we die to self; here we know that God is all in all. Noble-souled men find the brink of failure enchanted ground; there grow the loveliest flowers,

there are seen the fairest visions, there, not being able to stand on our feet, we begin to try our wings. The Indians say that you can step from one of their high hills to the celestial city; but really the brink of failure is the gate of heaven.

IV

FINED DOWN

Who can understand his errors? cleanse Thou me from secret faults.—Ps. xix. 12.

We may often notice how the vulgar vices reappear subtly disguised in cultured circles. All the offensive aspects of low licence have been cancelled; there is no bad language, no filthy habit, no smell of gin, no brawling, no pocket-picking; and yet closer acquaintance with the fine gentlemen and ladies shows that the falsity, the cruelty, the malice, and the intemperance which shocked us in the uneducated still survive. The grossness of the vices has been completely purged, everything now is delicate and distinguished, and there is nothing any longer to disgust or alarm. But the viciousness is not extinct. The vile body has been changed into a glorious body, yet the bad essence persists in the softened, polished, and elegant speech and manners of cultured life.

Is there not something like this in the saintly

life as compared with the old life? All the vices to which the soul is heir strive to reassert themselves in the Christian believer, and too often succeed in disturbing his peace and injuring his character. They are not now gross, offensive, violent; they are smooth and subtle, filmy and tenuous; they may even fail to provoke the notice and criticism of those who know us best. Yet we recognise in them, through their profoandest disguises, the deadly vices which, seen in their nakedness, all men loathe. Andrew Bonar writes in his diary: "This day twenty years ago I preached for the first time as an ordained minister. It is amazing that the Lord has spared me and used me at all. I have no reason to wonder that He uses others far more than He does me. Yet envy is my hurt, and to-day I have been seeking grace to rejoice exceedingly over the usefulness of others, even where it casts me into the shade. Lord, take away this Achan from me!" Again later he writes: "In my usual reading, in Genesis xxxvii., I see how envy leads God to heap more blessing upon the envied one, and to withhold from the envier. Now, this has been my fault in regard to brethren who have been blessed. I have sought to find reasons why they *should* not; like the men in the parable, murmuring against the good man giving his money to

them. Also, Lord, this day may I lay this aside for ever! Give more and more to those brethren whom I have despised or thought unworthy of revival work; and oh that I could praise the Lord for His goodness in pouring out His Spirit!"

So this devoted man was jealous of ministers who seemingly were more successful than himself. Envy was in his heart; but how skilfully and strangely disguised! Thus all the bad passions insinuate themselves into our life unless we steadily detect and reject them. If this holy man after twenty years in the ministry found within himself the canker of envy in connexion with revivals, all have need to challenge the thoughts of their heart. Anger finds its way to our breast by strange passages, kindling its unhallowed fire. Covetousness protests that it exists for noble ends, and justifies itself by most ingenious pretexts. Indulgence quotes Scripture. Pride infects the soul through beautiful and holy things, as men have been poisoned in the scent of a rose. Self-will possesses us under the name of zeal. Vanity vaunts itself in the songs, preaches in the pulpits, and feeds on the sacraments of the sanctuary. All these motions and outgoings of unrighteousness are ever striving to assert themselves in the Christian soul and life. The tenacity of sin is

marvellous, so is its sophistry. Hence we find a true saint like Bonar living in the midst of revivals, and yet after years of consecration passionately praying to be delivered from envy!

These evil thoughts and imaginations of the saintly heart may appear faint and inoffensive sins when compared with the crimson transgressions of the actual world; but the true disciple will not think so, neither will he treat them tenderly. The geologist reminds us that the frog tribe, those harmless inhabitants of our ponds, no bigger than a wineglass, are the representatives of an extinct progenitor—the labyrinthodon—that had a body larger than a hogshead, with capacious jaws fringed with teeth. The diminutive lizard is the living representative of the most stupendous forms of the animal creation that ever existed, such as the iguanodon, the plesiosaurus, the ichthyosaurus, the megalosaurus, the awful creatures of the Old World. And however much thoughts of evil may be reduced, softened, and etherealised, the best of saints recognise in such thoughts the direct kindred and representatives of the ferocious lusts and passions which war against the soul and threaten it with eternal ruin. The desires, weaknesses, and sins of the natural life are greatly diminished in the spiritual life; they have altogether lost their alarming aspect; their capacious

jaws seem no longer fringed with teeth; but they are none the less of the breed of monsters, and we must show them no mercy. May He cleanse the thoughts of our heart by the inspiration of His holy word!

V

THE GREATEST GIFT OF THE GREATEST GIVER

Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.—2 Cor. ix. 15.

The apostle has been speaking to the Corinthians about gifts, when all at once his heart takes fire and he bursts into this thanksgiving. He glorifies God for the whole wonderful and inexpressibly blissful work of redemption. In the apostle's reckoning Christ is the crowning gift of God to the race, and ecstatically he praises God for the glorious boon. Far beyond the good and perfect gifts of the material world is the preciousness of Jesus Christ our Lord. The philosopher tells us that during the course of ages all things have been evolved — the stars, the trees, the flowers, the beasts and birds; but he acknowledges that these are not the highest things: human intelligence, conscience, love, the noble sentiments, ideals, hopes, and aspirations of the race—these are the highest products of history. It was exactly in

these spiritual treasures that Christ enriched mankind, and enriched us in an infinite degree.

Christ brought *truth* on the highest questions of all, and taught us that truth most fully. We justly prize the great masters who gave us the knowledge of nature—Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Darwin; but more momentous still are the instructions of Moses, Isaiah, and the great moral masters of the ages. Here Christ is supreme. With surpassing authority and power He vindicated and disclosed the spiritual world and the spirituality of man. He made it impossible henceforth that the race should lose itself in materialism and sensuality. Christ brought *peace*. The Jewish world knew the severity of law—it beheld God in the terrors of Sinai; the Roman world knew the majesty and power of heaven—Jupiter sat on Olympus with the thunderbolt and eagle: but Christ spanned Sinai with the rainbow, and replaced the bird of blood with the dove of peace. He proclaimed the infinite love of God to a world of sinners. In Christ we have in its fulness the precious doctrine of grace, forgiveness, and peace. Christ brought *righteousness*. He secured to us the power of purity. He inspires the strength by which the highest goodness is attainable. In the pagan legend Prometheus kindled the human soul. Till then man was as heavy clay, scoffed at by the gods; but the Titan

put into the weak, sluggish creature a celestial spark, and henceforth he began to gaze at the stars, to reap the fruits of the earth, to sail the sea, to understand, to govern, to prophesy. Christ kindles within us a diviner spark, and makes possible to us not merely science, philosophy, commerce, and government, but a loving heart, a gracious temper, truth in the inward parts, a holy life, sacrifice, and service. By the spark of Pentecost, out of the dull, coarse clay of carnal man He created immortal apostles and saints. Cried David in his lamentation over Saul and Jonathan, "Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel." But Christ has done infinitely more for men than clothing them in scarlet; He has clothed them in white and put upon them ornaments of grace rarer than jewels of gold. Christ brought us *hope*. He came into the world in an age of weariness and despair, and He made everything to live by putting into the heart of the race a sure and splendid hope. He brought life and immortality to light. He caused men to forget hardship and suffering when He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

The advent of Jesus mightily enriched the race in incorruptible treasure—in knowledge, kindness, purity, and hope. How much it enriched us none

may tell. The gift is "unspeakable." It is infinite; it passeth knowledge. It is little use attempting to describe the indescribable, little use attempting to utter the unutterable. Nothing is left save to wonder; nothing is left to say except Hallelujah!

Have we received the unspeakable gift? Men do not readily believe in and accept the highest gifts. They are often strangely blind. Did they welcome Gutenberg? Did they strew flowers for Columbus? Did they forthwith crown George Stephenson? The world did not believe in these great givers; the gifts they brought were too grand. So, when the "unspeakable gift" was bestowed, men stood aloof in insensibility or scorn. Christ came to His own, but they received Him not. And to-day thousands see no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. He brought truth, but they walk in darkness; He brought grace, but they cling to the guilt and slavery of sin; He brought white garments, but they remain unwashed and unsanctified. An author is grieved when he discovers in our library an uncut volume of his presented to us long before. Poor author Yet thousands have never, figuratively speaking, cut the leaves of the New Testament and read the glorious story of infinite love. The message of God's redeeming mercy is disregarded by multi-

tudes of nominal Christians; and the Author this time may well grieve that the gospel written in His blood is ignored as a vain thing. Every now and then we hear of a superb masterpiece being discovered in a house where for years it has been neglected and unknown. The picture has been the butt of wit, penknives have mutilated it, it has been relegated to the attic. But in how many houses is that gospel which is the masterpiece of God ignored and despised! The savage living in a land of rich landscapes, of gorgeous birds, of priceless orchids, of reefs of gold, of mines of diamonds, of stores of ivory, and yet unconscious of it all, possessing only a hut and canoe, is a faint image of thousands in this Christian land who are living in spiritual poverty and hopelessness, utterly unmindful of the boundless treasure close to their feet.

Some of us have received the crowning gift of God; but we have not *fully* received it. That is a striking passage in Obadiah, "The house of Jacob shall *possess their possessions.*" What a great deal belongs to us that we do not possess! It lies beyond us untouched, unseen, unrealised; estates that we do not tread, gold that we do not reckon, dainties that we do not taste. We have a great inheritance in Christ; but we do not possess our possessions. The infinite light, grace, and energy which are really ours are most imperfectly actual-

ised in our experience. This poor experience is not the measure of the gift of Christ. We possess the dust of gold rather than the gold itself, a few rose leaves rather than the garden, the grape gleanings rather than the vintage. As we celebrate the advent of our Lord let us afresh seek to possess the fulness of the blessing He came to bestow. He means to make us unutterably peaceful and pure; and we ought not to be satisfied with less. Oh for an experience that will correspond with the "unspeakable gift"! We are ready enough to grasp the lesser gifts of time and sense; let not these abate our desire for the superlative blessings "in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

We must not miss the great practical lesson of the text. The theme of the chapter is that of ministering to the saints. The apostle is exhorting the Corinthians to acts of generosity and sacrifice, and by way of motive he skilfully concludes his appeal with the text, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." If God has been so magnificent in His generosity to us, what ought we to deny our brother? Our thanks for Heaven's infinite gift must be expressed in our practical sympathy with the sons and daughters of misfortune and suffering. He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, and we must drink in His spirit and follow in His footprints.

VI

TECHNICAL TRAINING IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

And I said, This is my infirmity.—Ps. lxxvii. 10.

Whilst through the changing years we discover in ourselves many failings, most of us are humbled and distressed by special faults which tenaciously cling to us. These characteristic defects arise from personal temperament, or they are occasioned by circumstances, or perhaps they are the consequences of both. But, however we may explain their origin, they are very real and familiar, and go a long way toward spoiling life. The question is, How may we best deal with these faults? It cannot certainly be our duty to acquiesce in them and permit them to weaken and torment us from youth to years. Some may suggest that the true way of dealing with any distinct moral infirmity is to raise the general character and keep it full of vigorous life; and we at once agree that this suggestion contains

a great truth never to be forgotten. The first requisite in dealing with any particular malady is to maintain the general health; and this is as true of the spiritual life as it is of the physical. But whilst we do our utmost to send enriched and vitalised blood through our veins, neutralising infection and decay at all points of the system, we must give direct and marked attention to special morbid symptoms.

A scholar discerning in himself a special lack of mental aptitude and attainment must be coached assiduously in this very thing; a patient must give concentrated attention to the complaint which threatens him, or in a complication of ills to the one which seems the most menacing; and the definite religious or moral fault demands definite treatment. Our besetting sin may be talkativeness, irritability, exaggeration, harshness, close-fistedness, evil-speaking, unfeelingness, murmuring, or indolence; or it may be one more nearly allied with the appetites; but whatever its kind and degree, it ought to be dealt with after its kind. It is a most desirable thing for a Christian clearly to define his besetting fault—not to allow it to lurk in ambiguity; and then, having called it by its real name, to look it in the face and deal with it immediately and boldly. There is much to be said for the timorous man who cured himself

of cowardice by sleeping between a couple of skeletons.

We can sometimes effectually restrain personal faults by *wisely determining our circumstances*. As far as possible we ought to choose our neighbourhood, our company, or our trade with a view to the claims of the religious life; and conscious of special frailty, we should not lightly permit ourselves in certain localities, associations, and pursuits. Sick people are careful to choose for themselves a special climate when they are at liberty to do so. If they remain in England a residence is selected on a particular soil, and they are exacting as to air and water. Going farther afield they select Davos, Madeira, Hyères, the Cape, or Australia, according to the character of their invalidism. There is a climate classification sedulously studied by sick people. Ought not spiritual men to study "climatology," escaping as far as possible the circumstances that would naturally develop their constitutional failing, surrounding themselves with the influences which heal and help? It is something more than folly, for the sake of taste, pride, or gain, to remain voluntarily in positions which are spiritually unfavourable. If anyone objects to this selection of a safe environment as being artificial, it is enough to remember that wise men do not argue so when the health of the body is at stake.

We may observe this technical culture *by abstaining from certain courses, legitimate in themselves, but which are dangerous to us.* Some Christian men have renounced particular studies because they fostered tendencies which were better repressed. John Wesley relinquished the study of mathematics on this ground. Angelico would not paint a secular subject. Miss Havergal would not sing a secular song. Many Christians deny themselves in matters of appetite, being conscious that the indulgences which prove perfectly harmless to many are inexpedient to them. How truly wise and noble for men to act thus, although the world, not understanding their motive and liberty, counts them ascetic and narrow! And is not this a direction in which self-denial brings a blessedness far beyond that which any natural enjoyment could bestow? Here it may be said most appropriately, "No man enjoys more truly than he who renounces the gratification of his desires." There is a special line of self-denial which each may follow to his great spiritual advantage.

We may discipline ourselves *by persisting to do right things which are difficult and uncongenial to us, even when we do them with the least willingness and freedom.* A German physician says: "Precipitate men should accustom themselves to write and walk

slowly. The irresolute should endeavour to perform their acts with rapidity. The gloomy, romantic dreamer should be trained to walk with head erect, to look others straight in the face, to speak in a loud, distinct tone of voice. It may seem incredible, but I can affirm from personal experience that such habits exercise a great influence on both mind and body." That is, do the right thing, assume the right attitude, use the suitable expression, although you find yourself painfully lacking in the mood and disposition which such actions usually imply. The reasoning of this physician is, that right action has a tendency to induce right feeling. And there is a real place for such training in the spiritual life. "Do good, even when your heart is not free to it." With a painful lack of sympathy, still do the right act, speak the proper thing, form the correct habit, follow the true course; and this method will exercise a most salutary influence, awakening and strengthening the soul, and at last filling the just form and action with the reality and force of life. In some Roman Catholic institutions novices are compelled specially to do the things they most dislike. It would be a great mistake to attempt to follow any such rule in ordinary life; but we may sometimes with much profit coerce ourselves to actions, and courses

of action, where our convictions are clear that such action is right, whilst our feeling is strongly averse to obedience.

We ought *to take special precautions against our characteristic failing.* The man who sins with the tongue ought to set an express watch over the door of his lips. He whose peril is temper must keep his mouth as with a bridle. The covetous soul must resolve upon and maintain systematic beneficence, taking strong doses of enforced liberality, as at stated times and in fixed measure we take other medicine. The man given to appetite must put a knife to his throat. He who suspects a snare in the cup is bound to fortify himself with vows and pledges. The slothful must set themselves large tasks, and rest not until they are discharged. We are afraid of being too explicit and detailed in the discipline of our life, such painstaking seems minute and pettifogging; but in fact we cannot be too exact and thorough. Precautions which seem pedantic and a drill which seems mechanical may play an influential part in the formation of noble character.

> Yet, wouldst thou rise in Christ's self-mastering school,
> Thy very heart itself must beat by rule.

Our reading ought to bear upon our individual disposition and need. A distinct portion of our

reading may most profitably bear upon the special requirements of our personal life. One constitutionally desponding or passing through sorrowful experiences ought to give the preference to hopeful and consolatory authors; whereas generally such despairing ones confirm their melancholy by pessimistic literature. The man of God consciously in danger of worldly-mindedness should keep the just balance between this world and the next by ever-recurring studies of spiritual thoughts and things. In regard to special problems of character and life, Christian biography might perhaps render us larger service than it does if it were written with more discrimination; yet even now much religious portraiture is available that will help us most seasonably as we struggle with our sins and sorrows. We do not wish the warts to be painted, but we wish to know the regimen by which gracious men and women got rid of the warts; and some current biographies give welcome light on this mystery. These regulative views touching the relation of reading to experience and character may seem to savour of artificiality; but we are convinced that much may be done by a judicious selection in our reading to meet the unique demands of the individual soul.

Our devotions ought to be specific. Self-examination

should concern itself directly with our personal and private weaknesses, fears, and necessities. *Prayer*, often so vague and purposeless, ought to know what to ask for, and how to open its lips to purpose. We come before God as persons, not as indistinguishable instances of a species; and our idiosyncrasies, the features of our character, our personal temper and lot, the items and incidents of our career, our singular and exclusive life, all ought to be fully realised at His feet. The specificalness of our being and experience might, as a rule, be more fully followed out in the thoughts and supplications of devotional hours.

Specialism in personal religious culture has its dangers, but it has great merit. It is dangerous when it lingers complacently on a grace which is easy and which costs little, exaggerating it and throwing character out of proportion; it is admirable when it acutely and pertinaciously cultivates a grace that is not easy and that much needs development.

VII

UNSANCTIFIED TRIAL

She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God.—ZEPH. iii. 2.

WE read the other day of an awkward diamond. The diamond usually yields to the efforts of the grinding-tool, which makes several thousand revolutions in a minute. However, a large jeweller in New York had to confess himself beaten some time ago by a diamond which had been submitted for a hundred days to a grinding-wheel making twenty-eight thousand revolutions per minute. The diamond came out of this ordeal in precisely the same condition as before it was touched. The total distance represented by the revolutions of the grinding-wheel was equivalent to three times the circumference of the globe, and in this instance the ordinary weight of two pounds was replaced by one of forty pounds. The only effect of the combat was to put the lapidary on the sick-list from exhaustion. After this experiment

the jeweller gave up the task as hopeless, and sent the diamond as a curiosity to the Scientific Institute of New York.

Reading of this awkward gem made us think of the refractoriness of men under the purifying and shaping hand of God. How strangely and wickedly do we sometimes resist His wise and patient treatment! By the ordinances of nature, by the events of life, by the teachings and strivings of His Spirit, would He shape us, polish us, and make us things of beauty fit for splendid places; but we are blind, stubborn, indifferent, revolting, and infinite ingenuities of wisdom and love are lost upon us. The New York jeweller persevered until the total distance represented by the revolutions of the grinding-wheel was equal to three times the circumference of the globe; and God makes this earth to spin for fifty years, for seventy years, and yet men end in the gross condition in which they began! The awkward diamond was a curiosity, but we are forced to think that refractory souls are sadly common. In the sick lapidary we see a faint image of the sorrowing God when He is compelled to drop into the waste the soul designed as a star of light for His own diadem.

VIII

DRY-ROT IN CHARACTER

Will eat as doth a canker.—2 Tim. ii. 17.

We do our utmost to protect great buildings from fire and tempest, and yet all the time those buildings are liable to another peril certainly not less severe—the subtle decay of the very framework of the structure itself. The tissue of the wood silently and mysteriously deteriorates, and a calamity as dire as a conflagration is precipitated. The whole of the magnificent roofing of the Church of St. Paul in Rome had to be taken out at enormous expense because of the dry-rot. Scientific men by microscopic and chemical methods have investigated the causes of this premature decay, and after patient search they have discovered not only the fungi which destroy the wood tissue, but also the spore that acts as the seed of the fungus. So this obscure malign vegetation goes on in the heart of the wood, destroying the strength and glory of minster and palace.

Character is liable to a similar danger. All

evils do not come from the outside; all peril does not arise from fierce temptations and fiery trials. In our religious experience, as in our homes, not only do thieves break through and steal, but moth and rust destroy. Some of the worst possibilities of loss, weakness, and ruin emerge from within; the destroying agents work obscurely and stealthily, and are almost unsuspected until they have wrought fatal mischief. The fibre of will, conscience, and feeling is mysteriously eaten away, and we find that we no longer possess the faith, the sensibility, and the resolution of other days. No swift and violent assault of world, flesh, or devil has torn or stained us, but it has been like as when a moth fretteth a garment. We go on with the routine of life, we give place to dulness, deadness, and indifference; and all the while obscure germs of weakness and disease develop within and consume our moral fibre. Then one day a sudden temptation occurs, a severe emergency presents itself, and we fall into condemnation which surprises us and startles many.

The scientists who have discovered the spore that acts as the seed of fungus expect soon to provide a means of destroying this seed before it produces growth. And we Christian people need to watch against the beginnings of interior paralysis and decay, to keep down the malignant germs

which are ready to spring and ferment and infect. *Atmosphere is a preventive of dry-rot*, and it is an essential thing that the breath of heaven should have free course through our whole nature. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," and the Spirit of God ever moves in living currents through the heart and life of those who solicit Him and who give Him free course. The dry-rot does not affect what is open to the breeze; and if we constantly seek the fresh influences of the Holy Spirit, they shall destroy the subtle bacilli which exhaust the nerves of the soul, the deadly growths which mar its integrity. We must permit no stagnation, but ever seek fresh thoughts, comforts, inspirations, and perfections. Newness of life, a life always new, is the sovereign specific. Movement is salvation. *Sunshine is a fine antidote to dry-rot.* More and more are practical men persuaded of the efficacy of sunlight. What is the moral of this fact but that we should live in the sunshine of heaven? The sense of God's favour must be an abiding consciousness with us; we must realise the comfort of His Spirit; the joy of the Lord must be our strength. Sadness and dreariness, coldness and deadness, apathy and indifference, are prolific of the germs of decay, of the microbes of disease. *Purity keeps out dry-rot.* The builder must watch against un-

healthy conditions, and saturate joists and sleepers with the necessary chemical solutions. So must we keep ourselves from whatever would infect, and evermore steep our moral faculties and life in the antiseptic influences of truth and grace. We must saturate our understanding with the blessed truths of the New Testament, our imagination with Christ's beauty, our affections with God's love. The moth, the microbe, the spore, cannot live in a soul that is daily seasoned in the strong and fragrant virtue of heavenly fellowship and blessedness.

IX

THE SECRET OF SPEED

I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart.—Ps. cxix. 32.

This was the language of one who did not run; and many still lag behind. It might have been predicted that the faults of Christians would be chiefly faults of excess—that they would strive after an ideal excellence until they became impracticable in actual life; that they would become so enamoured of the sanctuary as to neglect their worldly interests; that they would work so passionately as to impair their health; that holding money so lightly, they would become victims of a romantic charity. But it is hardly thus. Our faults are notoriously on the side of defect, and not of excess —on the side of lukewarmness, not of enthusiasm. We are far more in danger of standing still than of running ourselves out of breath. Most of us have reason to be ashamed of the defects of our obedience, the meanness of our sacrifice, the meagreness of our work, the formalism of our worship.

The enlargement of the heart is the secret of speed.

The enlargement of the heart means an increase of *knowledge*. "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the seashore." This is an answer to the king's prayer for the influx of new mental light and vigour.

It means an increase of *faith*. The text is a prayer for larger apprehensions of God's greatness, goodness, and truth.

It means an increase of *joy*. "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress."

It means an increase of *love*. "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged," expanded with affection. The enlargement of the heart means an increase of light, insight, love, trust, hope, gladness, God touching our spirit anew and awakening it to a higher and fuller life in Himself.

Let us note how this enlargement of the heart conduces to a more prompt and acceptable obedience.

1. On a journey we may find ourselves hindered *by the nature of the path on which we walk*. The path of perfect obedience is high and difficult. Says the psalmist, "I have seen an end of all perfection: but Thy commandment is exceeding broad." That is, I have seen the limitations of all that men

call beautiful and perfect and great: but Thy commandment is exceedingly lofty, immeasurable, sublime, and the longer I live the more it grows upon me. Yes; the path of perfect obedience is high and difficult to feet like ours. What, then, is to be done? Is the commandment to be brought down to our imperfection and frailty? Is the height and grandeur of duty to be tempered to our weakness? This we foolishly desire. We trust that a way may be found to accommodate the law to our impotence, and that we may be excused the fulness of its exaction. But this is not the psalmist's point of view in our text. He does not ask that the standard shall be lowered, the precept modified, the law relaxed; he prays that his heart shall be enlarged. The commandment must not be brought down to the man; the man must be brought up to the commandment. If we are renewed within, however exact and glorious the law may be, we shall promptly and joyfully accomplish it. Let us beware of lowering great ideals. Whenever we feel the loftiness of the commandment, whenever we catch a glimpse of its white top in the heavens, let us plead for more light, faith, and strength, and the impracticable shall become the possible—nay, the delightful. We must not faint because of the weakness of our nature; we must not deny the possibilities of life; we must not attempt to

lower the pathway of duty. Let us rather seek the solution of the difficulty in the strengthening of the soul; let us crave more of the cherub's illumination, more of the seraph's fire, and we shall find the path of perfection what the angels find it—a summer path of flowers

2. A traveller may be checked *by obstructions on the road.* So the Christian pilgrim finds a variety of trials and troubles to be stumbling-blocks in the heavenly pathway, and he is tempted to think that the removal of these barriers is all that is required. How rapid our pace if these difficulties and provocations were no more! And with this flattering unction we comfort our soul as we crawl along in the spiritual life. If Father Time should one fine day sweep these obstructions out of our path, a few swift steps will bring us to the golden goal. Our text, however, is framed on another philosophy. The psalmist had trials and difficulties, personal, domestic, and political; but he does not plead for the removal of these: he simply pleads for a larger heart. He does not pray, Take the difficulties out of the way, and I will run; but, Enlarge my heart, and I will run, no matter what difficulties may be in the way. It is a great mistake to think that the most desirable thing is a clearer, smoother path; what we most need is a braver, warmer heart. The world cannot be soft-

ened down to our cowardice and weakness; our strength must be multiplied to vanquish its barriers and besetments. If it please God to enlarge our soul with fresh affection and heroism, we shall run through a troop and leap over a wall.

3. The pilgrim is hindered *by burdens he may have to carry.* So the apostle teaches that many things may become burdensome to us. "Let us lay aside every weight." Every weight that we can lay aside we must lay aside; but many innocent and proper things become weights to us, and these we need not lay aside. Riches, honours, pleasures, friendships—these get too much hold upon us and spoil our speed. We cannot run; we can hardly walk. What is to be done to expedite our progress? Are these embarrassing things to be renounced, to be laid aside? It may be well from time to time to chasten earthly desire; but the loftiest teaching of Christianity does not promise spiritual progress through the reduction of material interests and relations. And this was the view of the psalmist. He does not say, Take away my gold, my scarlet, my diadem, and I shall run; but, Enlarge my heart, and I shall run, despite gold and greatness and glory. For the acceleration of our speed we do not need less of this world's goods and honours, but more inward grace and force. Let my heart be enlarged, and

honour shall impede me no more than a purple girdle round my loins, pleasure delay me no more than it does a pilgrim to pick up a wayside flower, wealth shall no more prove a hindrance than are shining spangles on an athlete's dress. Let us pray that God may purge our vision, deepen our sympathy with the unseen, exalt our imagination and hope, and the world shall no longer burden or fetter. More than anything else, it is a question of larger inward blessing.

4. The racer is hindered *by superfluous garments.* "The sin which doth so easily beset" is the chief entanglement and arrestment. The unmastered evil of our hearts fetters us most; like a garment it encircles us, wraps us round. There is only one remedy for this—fresh and fuller spiritual power. A new heart, and ever new, disencumbers of the besetting sin and gives us the secret of speed. A bigger heart is the main thing always, and it would be infinitely better if we oftener looked within for the solution of our difficulties. We need not ask for a lower path, a smoother path, or a shorter path to heaven, but for a soul fuller of spiritual enthusiasm; then shall the rough places be smooth, the crooked paths straight.

We see here *the true way of going to heaven.* We are to run. It is not wise, right, or safe to live coldly and loosely. Old Donne says Let me

go upon crutches, so I go to heaven." But there are two objections to going to heaven that way. First, no man chooses a pair of crutches when he is offered a pair of wings. No one, surely, ought to go to heaven slowly, painfully, when he can go triumphantly. And the second objection is, that those who go upon crutches hardly get to heaven. "Lest that which is lame be turned out of the way." A halting Christian is more likely to be turned out of the way than to continue unto the end; for any trivial thing in the path sends him sprawling on all fours. Away with such tardiness and precariousness! We are to march as conquerors; we are to return with joy upon our heads; we are to mount with eagles—our spirit regal, our mood heroic, our step unfaltering.

We see here *the secret of power and progress.* Our progress is not regulated by the state of things about us, but by the fact and intensity of our spiritual life. Great faith, high resolve, and glowing love go over Jordan dryshod. A cold, feeble heart finds the shallowest rivulet as terrible as the swellings of Jordan.

One of the greatest mistakes of our spiritual life is the habit of exaggerating the without, and paying too little attention to the within. We are ingenious in finding reasons why we should be excused from keeping the highest and purest law;

we urge our constitutional weakness and our despotic circumstances in extenuation of our failures, —when we might by the renewal of our inward strength turn the statutes to music. We are staggered by the difficulties of life, and from one year to another excuse our stagnation on the ground of these discouragements,—when a fresh idea in our brain, a fresh spark of love in our heart, a fresh inbreathing of the hallowing and delivering grace, would make all such difficulties insignificant and absurd. We find the blessings of life a snare, the very gifts of God burden and jeopardise us, the sweet and precious things of providential love stay our steps as the golden apples broke the speed of the fabled runner of old,—when a clearer, loftier soul, a larger trust, a more loyal affection, a more glowing zeal and consecration, would realise in all natural blessings fresh incentive and strength to run the glorious race. Entangled by evil tempers and passions, we vainly seek to extricate ourselves by the discipline of policy,—when the interior power and purity which prayer secures would triumph with a shout over passion and temptation. The world within us is the main matter. All difficulties dwindle as the soul expands. Bitter mysteries are solved by a simpler trust. Barren branches blossom and bend as the roots of our life are enriched. Grace abounding, a double

portion of the Spirit, the love of God shed abroad in the heart, reawakening hunger and thirst after righteousness, the second blessing leading to the third and so on to infinity—here is the consolation and hope of the saints. Strengthened with strength in our soul, we shall trip no more, crawl no more, stand still no more, but run in the path of life, and

Even in running think ourselves too slow.

If our heart has become faint and cold, we know what to do. When the fire went out on the altar of the Greeks, it was relighted by the beams of the sun. Let us bring our heart into fresh contact with the purging Fire, the quickening Flame, and difficulty and failure shall be things of the past.

X

SELF-REVELATION

He is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror —Jas. i. 23 (R.V.).

The temperance papers have just recorded the story of a woman who resolved that her husband should know his appearance when he was drunk. She knew well enough, and needed not that any should tell her; her children also knew by sad experience: but the man himself had a very imperfect idea of the state of the case. So once, when he came home inebriated and fell into a maudlin slumber, she sent for the photographer and had her husband photographed as he sat in his chair. When the photograph was laid beside the husband's plate at breakfast next morning, it was a revelation, the sobered man experienced a decidedly new sensation. There was no need of explanation; explanation was unnecessary. There was no possibility of contradiction, and no room for argument. It was said that the convicted man had the sense and courage to reform. It will be

difficult, however, to extend the use of the camera far in this service of morality. It might show how we looked in a fit of passion, in the hour of strutting vanity, or in the act of putting into our pocket money that did not belong to us. No doubt most men have reason to be thankful that a snap-shot was not taken of them in certain unguarded hours. But, as we say, the service of the camera will be limited in this direction, few sins being so susceptible of representation as drunkenness. Photography, it is true, is now used in the service of physiology in a remarkable way. By the application of instantaneous photography to the study of the heart's action medical science has been much assisted. By means of an instantaneous drop-shutter, giving an exposure of one-sixtieth of a second, Dr. Thompson of New York has succeeded in obtaining images of the heart itself in successive phases. By taking a series of such photographs, the whole cycle of the heart's action can be studied at leisure in a series of pictures reproducing with absolute faithfulness the aspect of the heart before, during, and after systole. But wonderful as are the achievements of the camera in recording the more visible and the more obscure phenomena of physical life, it goes only a little way in reproducing the movements and features of the moral life. That life lies apart; it

is delicate, intangible, elusive; and its mysterious action can be pictured only very imperfectly by sensitive plate, lens, and the light of the sun.

But in other ways we are furnished with our moral photograph. Public men occasionally find their true self depicted in the journals with startling frankness and accuracy. A wife will sometimes give her husband a verbal photograph of his spirit and disposition, every bit as true and striking as the objectionable portrait laid on the breakfast table by the faithful spouse who revealed Philip drunk to Philip sober. There are occasions when the kodak is used by the other party and the unflattering image is presented at the other end of the table. Children are apt to strike off extraordinarily sharp and afflictive pictures of their seniors. Our neighbours present us with portraits of ourselves that we should not care to see hung in the National Portrait Gallery. And not rarely does the faithful preacher surprise his hearers by revealing themselves to themselves as Nathan convicted David. But, after all, it is in the action of the Spirit of God upon the individual conscience that self-revelation is known in its most perfect and vivid fashion. This Searcher of the thoughts of the heart, on occasion, forces the hidden man of the heart to declare himself, and we are convicted and confounded as the sinner

in our anecdote was by the spectacle of his drunken self. Very wonderful are some of the feats of photography. The delicate film on the plate being more sensitive than the retina of the eye, stars so distant and faint as to be invisible to the observer through the most powerful telescope are made known by the camera. It gives a perfect picture of the falling snowflake. It registers changes which our senses are not fine enough to perceive. It analyses the movements of a swallow's wing. By the spark of a Leyden jar, which is brighter than the light of the sun, a bullet discharged from a gun has been photographed, and the bullet travelling faster than sound appears in the negative as if at rest. But all this is only a dim and distant suggestion of the swift and delicate action of the Spirit of God in the human soul, recording and revealing the thought afar off, the fugitive fancy, the obscurely working feeling, the unconfessed intent, and all the subtle secrets which belong to our deepest life. The Spirit of God knows us, and as we can bear such knowledge He acquaints us with the facts of our own heart. In memorable moments we see ourselves as God sees us.

Self-revelation is always a serious thing. It is humiliating to contemplate in cold blood and dry light deeds done in the purple light of imagination

and in the hot blood of passion. To be freed from illusions about ourselves and to realise our weakness and shame is a trying process. It is satisfactory to learn that the sinner in our story took kindly the presentation of the picture of his worse self, and reformed: it might easily have been otherwise; it might have proved the death of his self-respect and precipitated his doom. So the sight of our erring selves may mean a lapse into the cynical, the morbid, the despairing. Self-revelation is ever a serious thing, and with perceptions of fitness and seasonableness utterly unknown to us does the Spirit of God seize the critical hour. We are henceforth all the better or all the worse; self-revelation never leaves us as we were. Doctors refrain from telling us the whole truth about ourselves, and no doubt their reticence is fully justified. Often it would be injurious to the patient to know the full fact and peril of his sickness; it would delay his recovery, it might altogether prevent that recovery. It is a delicate matter to inform the patient of his state, and therefore the physician imparts or suppresses his knowledge as may be best for the sufferer. He must with fine discrimination tell the truth as it is expedient and in the moments when it can best be borne. How true is this with respect to the sovereign

Physician! It is impossible that we should ever know all the wisdom and gentleness of the great Healer. A premature revelation of ourselves would plunge us into the depths of despair, and so He tells us terrible facts and glorious facts as the soul can bear.

When the moment for self-revelation comes, let us not resent it. How foolish it would have been for the tippler in our story to have denounced the photographer! It is infinitely better to accept the presentment with all its humiliations. No one is more interested in the truth about myself than I myself am. Let us never excuse, flatter, pity, pamper, or forgive ourselves. The longer we live the more sure we are that the men who reach the highest character and influence are precisely those who are unflinchingly faithful with themselves, who never offer apologies for themselves to themselves, but who are always on the side of the ugly portrait. Thank God for the knowledge of the most unpalatable truth! A true vision of our sorry selves may be, ought to be, the beginning of new and better days. But if self-revelation is to work this benign consequence, we must look steadily at another likeness than the sad one. Oh, sweet it is in the hours of shame and reproach to look up and see the strong and beautiful One who came to seek and to save that which was lost!

XI

STRAINED PIETY

Be not righteous overmuch.—Eccles. vii. 16.

With commentators this is a much controverted text; it may, however, fairly be taken as a warning against strained piety. Not that a man can ever be too righteous, but he may strive after a righteousness that is false and injurious. The other sentence in this passage may help us to understand what the sacred writer meant by overmuch righteousness: "Neither make thyself overwise." Some people are known as being "too clever, too clever by half." We all know what this means; we know such people. Men cannot be too wise, too gifted, too skilful; but they can be too clever, too clever by half. They can reveal intellect in ways which are not exactly legitimate, and which do not commend themselves to sensible and honest people. So goodness sometimes finds a similarly false, irritating, and dangerous expression, or it has a superfluity that makes it objectionable and injurious.

We may think that this excess in piety, excess in any direction, is rare, and hardly calls for express consideration. But this is not so. It is a common thing for religion to run wild, to be pushed on wrong lines; for goodness to become strained, arbitrary, inharmonious, and exaggerated. Let us give a few illustrations of this strained piety.

1. It sometimes reveals itself in *doctrinal fastidiousness.* Paul writes to Timothy, "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." Hold fast the form, the pattern. The religion of Christ finds expression in the definite, the concrete, the intelligible. But some of us are not content until we have etherealised the great articles of our faith, made our creed vague, intangible, and generally such as it is not possible for a man to utter. De Quincey said of Coleridge, touching the poet's endless refinements and transcendentalisms, "He wants better bread than can be made with wheat." This is rather a common failure in our day, and especially with men of a certain temper. They refine and sublimate their creed until they let slip the substantial saving verity. The doctrine of the incarnation is attenuated until Christ becomes a mere phantom. To escape all suspicion of mechanical inspiration, the doctrine of inspiration

is refined until the mighty comfort and strengthening of the simple honest words of prophet and apostle are lost. And so with the master doctrine of atonement, they translate it into metaphysics which make the cross of Christ of none effect. In a sense we are obliged to rationalise our creed, penetrate its real meaning, apprehend its reasonableness and consistency; but let us beware lest we hunger because we want better bread than can be made with wheat. The religion of Christ is a religion of history, fact, form, letter, and we must take care how we sky it. The chymist, clever man that he is, can volatilise the diamond; but volatilised diamonds have lost their reality, beauty, and worth. A precious creed can be rarefied in a similar fashion and with a similar result. We may strain after pure, metaphysical, absolute truth until we destroy ourselves. It is a grand thing to leave our wonderful abstractions and come down to the Bible, to the Lord's Prayer, to the Ten Commandments, to the Beatitudes; a grand thing to leave sublime idealisations, and walk and talk with the historical Jesus: "for we are members of His body, and of His flesh, and of His bones." The most mystical of the apostles kept fast hold of the definite, the corporeal, the historical: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with

our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." Come down from the thin air, recite the Apostles' Creed, sing the Te Deum. Touch the rock. Be not wise overmuch.

2. Strained piety reveals itself in *morbid introspectiveness.* There is of course such a thing as a just introspection, that a man should look closely into his own heart and life. Self-examination is a solemn duty; yet it is liable to be misconceived and pressed to false issues. Men sometimes get morbid about the state of their health. For example, they are always weighing themselves. The weighing-machine is now an institution; it figures at every railway station, its owners find it a lucrative property. A multitude of nervous people spend much time and money in ascertaining their weight. They know what they weighed last year, last month, last week. Their feelings go up or down with their weight; they are the sport of their gravity. We all feel that such solicitude is a mistake; it is the sign of a morbid, miserable condition. Sensible people have something better to do, and do it. But good people are, not rarely, victims of a similar morbidity: they are jealous about their religious state, curious about obscure symptoms, always with beating heart putting themselves into the balances of the sanctuary.

This habit may prove most hurtful. Instead of such excessive solicitude being conducive to safety it is altogether full of peril. It makes men morally weak and craven, destroying their peace and robbing their life of brightness. How often we feel this in reading the biographies of true and noble saints! They brooded so closely and persistently over their personal defects and failures, over their errors, infirmities, and fears, that they ate out the strength of their heart, and more or less spoiled the freedom, grace, and glory of life. Beware of pushing a quiet self-supervision into unhealthy brooding. Why shouldst thou destroy thyself? We need to watch our health, but our finger must not always be on our pulse; "for God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

3. Strained piety reveals itself in *an exacting conscientiousness.* On the supreme importance of conscientiousness we are all agreed, yet it is easy to push this conscientiousness into scrupulousness. Many Christian people are fertile of ingenious, gratuitous, embarrassing, exasperating distinctions and exclusions. It was said of Grote that "he suffered from a pampered conscience." Many good people do. It is a legal maxim that "the law concerneth not itself with trifles," and the court is specially impatient of "frivolous and vexatious" charges;

but some of us are evermore arraigning ourselves at the bar of conscience about arbitrary, frivolous, and vexatious things. It is a great mistake.

It may be said, There is no special necessity to rebuke extreme nicety of conscience, little need in this callous world for this; a conscience much exercised about trifles is at least awake, sensitive, and faithful. But really solicitude about trifles is the sign of a defective conscience. There are various kinds of the bad conscience—a seared, a defiled, a blinded, a drugged conscience; but a pampered conscience is also a bad conscience. Christ shows that the conscience of the Pharisee, exercised by infinite detail and casuistry, was essentially lacking in sensibility and faithfulness. Mommsen in a striking passage points out that it was precisely the same with the conscience of the Roman nation in the era of its decadence. He says: "They pushed the natural rule—that no religious service can be acceptable to the gods unless it is free from flaw—to such an extent in practice, that a single sacrifice had to be repeated thirty times in succession on account of mistakes again and again committed; and that the games, which also formed a part of divine service, were regarded as undone if the presiding magistrate had committed any slip in word or deed, or if the music even had paused at a wrong time, and so had to be

begun afresh, frequently for several, even as many as seven, times in succession. This exaggeration of conscientiousness was already a symptom of its incipient torpor; and the reaction against it—indifference and unbelief—appeared without delay."

A true and noble conscience is tender, quick, incisive, imperative; but it is also large, majestic, generous, as is the eternal law of which it is the organ. We cannot pretend to go through life with a conscience akin to those delicate balances which are sufficiently sensitive to weigh a pencil mark; if we attempt such painful minuteness, we are likely to be incapable of doing justice to the weightier matters of the law. Carefulness about the purity of what we eat is desirable; but if we take a microscope to the table we shall probably starve. Whilst truly spiritual and faithful, strong and sincere, there will be a certain greatness and magnanimity in our conscience, and without any fretting, miserable fastidiousness we shall be faithful at once in things both great and small.

4. Strained piety reveals itself in *the inordinate culture of special virtues.* For some reason or other a man conceives an affection for a particular excellence, it engrosses his attention, it shines in his eye with unique splendour. But this extreme love for any special virtue easily becomes a snare. We hear much of the evils of specialism in science, in

medicine, in artisanship; and specialism in character has also its extreme inconveniences and dangers.

A literary botanist says, "Most of the faults of flowers are only exaggerations of some right tendency." May not the same be said about the faults of Christians? They have strained after a particular virtue until it has imparted to their character disproportion and disagreeableness. There is the man of conscientiousness. Righteousness is the cardinal virtue in his eyes; and indeed his eyes are so full of the great virtue that he can see little else. In the end he pushes justice to the point of injustice. He is the righteous man for whom nobody would die, but many would not care if he did. There is the man of kindness. In his eyes amiability is the premier grace, and he becomes guilty of imprudent generosity, doubtful compromises, lax rule. There is the man of temperance. He dwells on the merit of abstinence until the whole decalogue seems to be exhausted in a cup of cold water. There is the honest man. Outspokenness is the sum of the law to this brother. He is likely to become a fearful character, never being satisfied until he has proved his faithfulness by his discourteousness and insolence. There is the man of purity; not improbably known at last as a prude, sometimes as something worse. In

agriculture fruits and flowers may be over-cultivated; they may be enlarged and doubled until the strawberry loses its flavour and the rose its perfume. And virtues may be over-cultivated; the most precious, beautiful, and delightful aspects of character becoming obnoxious through strain and exaggeration.

We need to take a wider view, to cultivate justly and impartially every grace of the Christian character. We want comprehensiveness, fulness, balance, harmony. Aiming at the larger ideal we shall be saved from extravagance, angularity, and littleness. "Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect to all Thy commandments."

5. It reveals itself in *striving after impracticable standards of character.* We cannot have too lofty an ideal of character; but we may easily have pretentious, spurious ideals on which the soul wastes its precious energies. It is a fine characteristic of Christianity that it is so sane, reasonable, practical, and humane; it never forgets our nature and situation, our relations and duty. High, pure, spiritual, heavenly, and divine, it is yet available for men, women, and children on the earth, here and now. But many think to transcend the goodness of Christianity; they are dreaming of loftier types of character, of sublimer principles, of more illustrious lives than Christianity knows.

Positivism gives an illustration of this. An old objection to Christianity was that it enjoined a morality so superfine as to be practically inaccessible. *Now* the Positive philosophy declares that the great principle of Christian ethics is low and selfish. Christianity says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"; but the new morality says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and ignore thyself." Christianity is discredited by a supposed nobler ideal. So they aim to eclipse us in that grace of charity which has been our prize rose for two thousand years; so they add another hue to the rainbow, even the rainbow that is round about the throne.

Monasticism affords an illustration of this straining. Asceticism, to which some scholars think that reference is made in our text, was a distinct attempt to reach an unearthly perfection, a perfection certainly away from anything contemplated in the New Testament.

Protestantism has also its false strivings. Some evangelical Christians have very arbitrary and bizarre notions of holiness. They deny themselves in things that God has not denied them, and pique themselves on virtues of which the New Testament knows nothing. They are too bright and good. The superior people of the churches, they look superciliously upon ordinary disciples.

But this straining after ideals other than those of Christianity is utterly false and deeply hurtful. Speaking of the monks who fell into frightful immoralities, Charles Kingsley says, "Aiming to be more than men, they became less than men." It is ever the case. Fanciful ideals exhaust us, distort us, destroy us.

What sweet, bright, fragrant flowers God has made to spring on the earth — cowslips in the meadow, daffodils by the pools, primroses in the woods, myrtles, wallflowers, lavenders, pinks, and roses to bloom in the garden, an infinite wealth of colour, sweetness, and virtue! But in these days we are tired of God's flowers, and with a strange wantonness we dye them for ourselves: the world is running after queer blossoms that our fathers knew not—yellow asters, green carnations, blue dahlias, red lilacs. And in the moral world we are guilty of similar freaks. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise." Ah! these blooms we know; these are the old sweet flowers which grow in the paradise of God: but these fancy graces of positivism, these forced virtues of asceticism, these affectations and arti-

ficialities of holiness, are the green carnations, the blue roses, the discoloured violets and jonquils of the religious world.

"Learn of Me," says the Master. Yes; let us go back to Him who was without excess or defect. Nothing is more wonderful about our Lord than His perfect naturalness, His absolute balance, His reality, reasonableness, artlessness, completeness. With all His mighty enthusiasm He never oversteps the modesty of nature. With all the sublime patterns that He shows on the mount, how easy and delightful He is with the children of men! With all His vision of an infinite and eternal perfection His life was full of ease and grace. Weak men create the bizarre; genius is free from strain and eccentricity. The artistic masters create miracles of beauty within academic law. This was eminently true of our Lord. Nothing excessive, nothing wanting; nothing artificial, nothing unsymmetrical; no underdoing, no overdoing. The goodness of Christ was like the sunshine, the breeze, the dawn, like the sweet summer rain braided with the rainbow. Let us live much with Him, and He shall make us sharers of His spotless beauty.

XII

WEARINESS

Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.—Gal. vi. 9.

The absence of enthusiasm is a serious defect. We must not only be good and do good, but strong force and purpose ought also to enter into all our being and action.

Men sometimes lose heart in spiritual things because *they find the path of life difficult.* Some portions of the road are steep, some are dark, some are rough, some are slippery, and the heart of the people is discouraged because of the way. We loiter in flowery paths and faint in rugged ones.

This falling away may result from *the extreme difficulty of realising moral perfection.* When a critic complained in the presence of Turner that a picture was not perfect, the great artist broke in, "Perfection! you don't know how hard it is." The spiritual man knows how hard moral perfection is, and is ready to let his great ideals slip

as if they were unattainable dreams. We are exhausted by the very splendour of our aim.

Sometimes we are depressed because *the way seems long.* I remember seeing an epitaph for an old man: "Being weary with the journey." But long before we are exactly old we are weary of this journey. Our hopes are disappointed, one trying thing succeeds another, and to a disenchanted pilgrim the way appears tedious.

Always this enervation *is the result of neglect.* Some plants grow without either earth or water; simply suspend them in a room, and they find all they need in the atmosphere. But grace is not such a plant, for unless constantly refreshed it loses its vigour and bloom. Here many err. The world is ever pressing upon us; the flesh drinks the life of the spirit; manifold conflicts exhaust us; and neglecting to renew their strength, the strong men faint and even the young men utterly fall. We are unbraced and unnerved because we fail to wait upon Him who faints not.

The symptoms of this perilous languor are easily detected.

In weariness we *seek to reduce our exertions to the lowest possible point.* Weary men soon find out how little they may do, the least they may do. Retrenching our liberalities, we are feeling charity irksome; finding easy excuses for the neglect of

prayer, we are getting weary in devotion; resigning one office after another with ingenious pleas, we are becoming weary in service. Ever striving to bring our Christian life down to the lowest standard is proof positive of decaying conviction and enthusiasm. The whole-hearted man asks, "How much can I be, give, do?" The weary man asks, "How little?"

In weariness men *magnify trifles.* Dr. Livingstone tells that the Africans are sometimes afflicted by a singular disorder which causes them in passing over a straw to lift up their feet as if they were passing over the trunk of a tree. Weariness is a similar malady; it makes great efforts to overcome trifling and imaginary obstructions. The grasshopper is a burden. Weariness is seriously offended by the veriest trifles, by a word or look, or by the lack of a word or look, which really means nothing. Weariness permits the least thing to put aside family prayer. Weariness does not go to God's house because it was there last week. Weariness is extraordinarily particular about the weather. Weariness finds with increasing frequency that it does not approve the preacher. Weariness sees a lion in every path, a mountain in every molehill, a spectre in every straw.

In weariness *we find no pleasure in anything that we do.* The strong exult in action, but everything

is joyless to the feeble. The things that of yore were full of delight are oppressive and insipid. The tree of life droops into a willow. The sanctuary has no charm. The Sabbath is irksome. The Scriptures have so little interest that one turns the pages backward and forward, hardly knowing what to read. Prayer is a ceremony.

Great is the peril of debility and relaxation. In our moods of slackness and coldness any little thing may prove fatal. What a note of mingled alarm and tenderness we discern in the apostle's words to the halting Hebrews!—"Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way"; or, Lest it be quite put out of joint. Lame, flagging travellers are easily turned out of the way, a slight misfortune or difficulty may break them down altogether. They want handling gingerly, like glass. They must be coaxed like sick children. The next thing to being weary of God is to desert Him. The next thing to following Christ at a distance is to deny Him. The next thing to swooning on the precipice is to sink into the abyss. The extinction of enthusiasm is the point of death.

Ah! we must not faint. In due season we shall reap, if we faint not. The way may be difficult, but it is passable to stout hearts. Perfection may be hard, yet is it gloriously attainable. The way

never seems long when we view it from Pisgah. And although our spiritual life needs daily renewal, inexhaustible are the fountains of refreshment Away with impatience, fretfulness, despair! He who regulates the shining clockwork of the stars shall give us the reward in due season.

Think of the harvest field: the broad, bright acres of the heavenly universe.

Think of the harvest sheaves: glorified bodies, spirits made perfect, companionship of angels, fellowship of transfigured saints, the eternal smile of God. What piled up sheaves of light and beauty shall we gather to our jewelled breast!

Think of the harvest joy: the sigh of toil changed into the reaper's song; the sweat of the brow forgotten in the wealth of the hundredfold; no more hunger or thirst, but the wine of divine pleasure ever at our lips.

Think of the harvest day: "thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."

XIII

THE INGENUITIES OF LOVE

Being crafty, I caught you with guile.—2 Cor. xii. 16.

Henry W. Crosskey says: "I have heard of a young fellow who was in the habit of betting; he felt that he was on the way to destruction, but the gambling passion was too strong within him to be resisted. He told his Sunday-school teacher that he had given up many bad habits, but that from this one he did not feel able to escape. 'Were you always with me,' he said, 'I might manage it.' 'I cannot always be with you,' replied the teacher; 'but when and where do you gamble?' 'Oh, every day at the dinner-hour; I go down to the public-house at one o'clock,' was the answer. 'Well, I will tell you what I will do,' said the teacher: 'every day as the clock strikes one I will pray for you.' The young fellow was conquered. He came after a day or two, and said, 'I shall bet no more. Yesterday I tried to go to the public-house, and I could not. I thought what a shame it was that you should be praying for me, and that

I should be gambling at the public-house, and I could not do it.' "

Great is the ingenuity of love. It really seemed as if there was no way in which the teacher could meet this case; but great are the resources of a loving and sympathetic heart. It is very hard indeed to help some people; yet love finds a way where coldness and selfishness give up the thing as inaccessible and impossible. Then how wonderful sympathy is! It touched that lad's heart; and if we can only once succeed in making tempted and fallen souls believe that we really care for them and would do anything for their good, we acquire over them a marvellous influence. The hypnotism of sympathy is wonderful indeed; it places weak men and women under a benign and saving spell. The power of prayer is also illustrated in this story; in a peculiar way intercession availed. Sympathy and supplication influence men in an extraordinary degree. We are all rich in saving influences if we will only use them.

XIV

THE VALUE OF FEELING IN CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death.—Luke xxii. 33.

Feeling, as distinguished from ideas, convictions, and conscientiousness, plays a large part in Christian experience. Vague as the emotions may often be, they are still real and deep, and they are factors of prime moment in the religious life. Every Christian knows how continuously and suddenly feeling varies, and every religious student is familiar with this phenomenon. Feeling plays through a wide range of variations, from hypochondriasis to ecstasy; and its oscillations and contrasts are sometimes most perplexing. We pass from assurance to doubtfulness, from confidence to fear, from joyousness to sadness, from the stars to the abyss, with lightning-like swiftness. It is more than interesting to inquire into the causes of these fluctuations of feeling, to estimate their value, and to understand our duty in relation to them.

Circumstances often sway and colour our feelings. When a large slice of good luck befalls a Christian man, he is apt to take a rosy view of things, and to be ready with a radiant testimony; whilst a change from affluence and ease to a greater or less degree of conflict is likely to mirror itself in the sadness of the soul. Our feelings by no means necessarily respond to the everlasting flux of human affairs; but no one will deny that circumstances have a real general determining action on the imagination and sensibilities. To say that *atmospheric* variations in any degree condition religious experience seems absurd, but, more than we think, Christian experience follows the weather chart. Dr. T. D. Crothers has recently written in a science journal an article on the psychology of the weather, in which he says: "Very few persons recognise the sources of error that come directly from atmospheric conditions of experiments, and observers, and others. In my own case I have been amazed at the faulty deductions and misconceptions which were made in damp, foggy weather, or on days in which the air was charged with electricity and thunderstorms were impending. What seemed clear to me at these times appeared later to be filled with error. An actuary in a large insurance company is obliged to stop work at such times, finding that he makes so many mistakes, of

which he is only conscious later, that his work is useless. In a large factory from 10 to 20 per cent. less work is brought out on damp days and days of threatening storm. The superintendent, in receiving orders to be delivered at a certain time, takes this factor into calculation. There is a theory among many persons in the fire insurance business that in states of depressing atmosphere greater carelessness exists and more fires follow. Engineers of railway locomotives have some curious theories of trouble, accidents, and increased dangers in such periods, attributing them to the machinery." Powerful forces coming from the weather influence brain workers and others; and although Christian feeling often sets weather and climate at defiance, we may be sure that many of its startling changes have no deeper cause than skyey influences. A sincere brother will often confess how sadly he is "out of tune." It is a well chosen phrase. On certain days he is probably not himself, just as the strings of the violin are deranged by atmospheric changes. It would be wise sometimes to refer a depressed brother to the barometer rather than to the Bible.

The changes of our *physical life* project themselves into the spirit. The humours of the body easily become the humours of the mind. Black melancholy, the cheerful colours of hope, golden joy,

sweet peace, tormenting doubt, gloomy despair, clear vision, and triumphant assurance, all the frames and moods of the soul, are regulated in a real degree by the ever-varying fortunes of the flesh. Triumphantly enough the Christian life often sets physiology at defiance; but bone, brain, and muscle tell their tale in our complex life. It is said that there are ten million nerve fibres in the human body, so we may reasonably expect a few strange sensations. Then beyond these obvious conditions of feeling are *obscure causes*, partly bodily, partly mental, which deeply affect our fancies and sentiments. Scientists and philosophers know that we are subjects of influences and impulses which we do not in the least understand; that we are swayed by the unknown and the unconscious; that in our life are unrecognised thoughts and forces, laws and sub-laws, which move and mould us, as in the depths of space are dark orbs which astronomers infer without ever being able to discover. Our feelings do not invariably follow our state of health or our worldly condition; sometimes they palpably contradict our circumstances, being exactly contrary to what we should expect them to be—all serene and even gay with night and winter for an environment; all disquieted and despairing in a noonday and midsummer of visible prosperity and blessing. We wrestle not only with flesh and blood, but with

impalpable and imponderable forces which elude our philosophy. There is an electricity behind electricity which plays about us and makes sport of the wisest and best. In the centre of every human life is a realm of the unknown, "a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness."

We must be cautious how far we trust feeling. In many respects it is the most untrustworthy part of our nature. Now up and now down, now rejoicing in life and now bewailing it, now full of comforts and visions and now shut up without a gleam of hope or spark of glimmering day, we need ever to go back to the great standards, testing afresh our tempers, principles, and actions. A man says, "I feel very cold, the temperature must be nearly freezing; I feel very hot, the day is tropical": yet on examining the thermometer he probably finds that it is neither so hot nor so cold as he imagined; his impression is wide of the mark. A man sustains a few losses, and then broods over them until he is convinced that he has sustained great reverses and stands on the verge of bankruptcy; but opening the iron chest and examining one by one his securities he knows himself rich, and the nightmare sense of ruin is dissipated. Or it may be the contrary: the man feels himself rich and prosperous, yet testing his glowing sentiments by his ledger he knows

himself a beggar. Feeling may imply unreality, exaggeration, and misleading. Let us constantly test our faith, conscience, and conduct by the eternal, unalterable standard: if we are right there, the dreariest feelings need not alarm us; if we are wrong there, the most buoyant and ecstatic feeling will only mislead us.

We must seek to discipline feeling. Our impressions must not be allowed to run away with us. Self-government means much more than the rule of words and actions; it means the rule of the spirit—that is, of our thoughts, intents, and moods. Some Christians are in a very large degree the creatures of imagination and emotion. They could never give a good account why they are all smiles or all tears; slight and superficial causes make the vastest, the most violent, and the most irrational changes in their experience. It is unsafe thus to be the victims of sensation.

We must discipline feeling by *knowledge* — all kinds of knowledge, especially divine knowledge. Experienced travellers know tests by which they determine what is real in a prospect and what is mirage. We ought to be able to act thus in a life so troubled with illusions as ours is. We want ever more knowledge of Christ's laws, of His promises, of His will, and of Himself. Knowledge is a grand guarantee against erratic feeling. Let

us study the Bible more, and we shall be sure how far feeling is the index of fact; we shall know what is genuine and significant in it, and what is accidental and non-moral. We must discipline feeling by *action*. The life of duty, of practical and constant duty, saves from caprices and vagaries bred of reveries and contemplations. Daily duty earnestly and faithfully carried out keeps feeling pure and sane. Excessive brooding means a course of chills and fevers, of unmeaning intoxications and despairs. Action brings into experience a strong and stable element; in such a life we test ourselves at a thousand points by the actualities of the universe. We feel truly as we act, and act truly. We must discipline feeling by *sympathy*. Selfishness is at the root of many erroneous conceptions and of much false feeling. The more we enter into the lives of others and live for them the more unlikely are we to become the dupes of imagination. A solitary, selfish life teems with delusions and false estimates. To feel truly in all things concerning our character, standing, and hope is to feel much and deeply for others.

The constant play of feeling is not useless; it is, under the direction of the Spirit, educating us even more than circumstances do, and through ten thousand alternations of emotion we come to fulness and mellowness of life.

XV

A MEDITATION FOR EASTER

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.—Rev. i. 17, 18.

"Fear not." How full of consolation are these great words! They breathe majestic sympathy, and it is impossible to hear the triumphant strain without partaking in some degree of the magnificent exaltation it announces.

1. The text is consolatory in the *prospect* of death. Keys are symbols of authority and law, and the keys of death remind us that government and order prevail in the realm of mortality. Having regard to events which we constantly witness, it might seem that death is entirely lawless. Sweeter than the virgin rose, the young perish with the rose, whilst the very aged wearily grow older still; the strong are broken by sickness in a day, whilst the feeble linger on in helplessness and pain; the good

cease from the land, whilst the vicious remain to torment and pollute. We know not when death will make its appearance, or whom it will strike; it seems the most fitful of agents, setting at nought all probability and prophecy. But just as the meteorologist sees, and sees ever more clearly, how law governs the wind which bloweth where it listeth, so the actuary discerns regulating principles under the apparent capriciousness of death, and bases his insurance tables upon those ascertained principles. However it may seem, the dark archer never draws his bow at a venture. The gate of the grave is not blown about by the winds of chance; it has keys, it opens and shuts by royal authority.

If, then, we live wisely, our death shall not be accidental or untimely. I say, if we live wisely; for it is quite possible to break the law here, as it is to break it elsewhere, and so die prematurely. The wicked do not live out half their days, and good men through ignorance and infirmity shorten their life. But according to the measure of our wisdom we shall infallibly fulfil our appointed time. The engineer who constructs a locomotive knows the distance it will cover before it is worn out, one engine being calculated to accomplish a greater mileage, another less. Using material of a certain weight and quality, he knows

with tolerable accuracy what wear and tear his machine will endure, and, barring accidents, how long it will run. Thus He by whose hand we are fashioned and by whom all our members were curiously wrought knows the possibilities of our individual constitution, knows how far the throbbing machinery will go ere the weary wheels stand still: our appointed days are written in our physiological powers, not in a mystical Book of Fate. From this point of view it is not difficult to understand how one organism accomplishes a long journey, whilst another breaks down, having accomplished a few stages only.

We said the locomotive will cover a given distance, barring accidents; but what of the accidents which may put an end to the career of the locomotive before its possibilities are exhausted? And what of the thousand accidents which may put a period to human life in its very prime and power? Our answer is, Under the personal sovereign government of Heaven no real accident is possible to virtue. How fully in the days of His flesh did the Lord of life and death recognise the fact that no man, no thing, no event, could interrupt or prevent the fulfilment of His great mission! "The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto Jesus, Get Thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill Thee. And He said unto them, Go ye,

and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected" (Luke xiii. 31, 32). And again later: "Then saith Pilate unto Jesus, Speakest Thou not unto me? knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above" (John xix. 10, 11). No man might interfere with His destiny. And what was true of the Master is true of His disciples—they too are immortal until their work is done. In Old Testament times men earnestly desired a life that should be visibly dramatic and complete, one that should be full of days, riches, and honour; but the New Testament recognises that apparently mutilated and incomplete lives are not really so, they having attained a deeper, grander completeness. "So John finished his course." Finished it early, violently, sadly; it was not therefore a broken, frustrated life, but one finished as a picture or an epic is. John does not stand in the temple of God as the shattered column in the churchyard, but as a pillar fair and tall, richly adorned from base to capital, bearing a weight of glory. Speaking to a man surprised by death, and who says, "I have not finished the five acts, but only three of them," Marcus Aurelius replies, "Thou sayest

well; but in life the three acts are the whole drama. For what shall be a complete drama is determined by him who once was the cause of its composition, and now of its dissolution. But thou art the cause of neither. Depart, then, satisfied, for he also who releases thee is satisfied." If the pagan philosopher could see this, how much more ought it to be understood by us who know Him that hath the keys of life and death!

Our lives are not, then, the sport of fate and circumstance. All shall come to pass in God's good time, or with His wise permission. The woodman knows how trees of different species must be felled at various seasons; it is best that some should be cut down with the fresh leaves of spring upon them, that the axe should smite others whilst they are robed in summer's pomp, whilst a third kind must fall when the sap dies down in autumn and the leaves are tinged with the colours of decay. The forester knows when to smite the forest glories; and there is One who knows why some human lives cease in their sweet spring, why others perish in manhood's pride, and why, again, others survive to patriarchal years. At the right time, at the right place, and in the right way we suffer the stroke of mortality. Death to some may be a blind Fury cutting short life's thin thread; but we know that the power of life and death is in

the hands of One whose name is Love, and before His fingers turn the key His eyes of flame see the necessity and dictate the moment.

2. The text is consolatory in the *article* of death. We have here not only teaching concerning the law of death, but also precious doctrine touching the lawgiver. Jesus Christ is the Lord of death. By virtue of His divinity He holds the mystic keys. "I am the first and the last, and the Living One." "I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty." It is the prerogative of Almighty God to give life, to sustain it, and to take it away. But Christ is also Lord of death by virtue of His own death and resurrection: "I was dead, and behold, I am alive," and so with special propriety and significance He holds sovereignty in the kingdom of shades. The actuary, as we have seen, is fully convinced that within the seeming fortuitousness of death there is an all-enfolding, all-compelling law; but it remains for revelation to show the nature of that law, and by whom it is administered. Here, then, is the grand teaching of the text: the law of death is the active will of Jesus Christ.

It is the glory of Christianity that it consistently exhibits law not as metaphysical rule, impersonal force, or abstract order, but as the action of a personal, intelligent, loving Ruler. The law

of creation is the will of a wise and gracious Creator, who rejoices in all that His hands have made; the law of evolution is the will of an Evolver, who with wise purpose and unfailing intelligence presses forward all things to a "far-off divine event"; the law of dissolution is the will of a just and infallible Judge, who determines all crises. What comfort would it be to the dying to know that death was regulated by an impersonal, absolute decree, to know that it was a stern, methodical law that bore us down to the grave? The consciousness of law is gratifying to the logical understanding; but there is little satisfaction in finding ourselves dominated by a bloodless law that with undeviating regularity sweeps us and our fellows into the dust. It inspires no comfort to think of the dark reaper advancing upon us with pitiless face, measured step, and murderous steel, mowing down with faultless uniformity sweet flower and bearded grain. That Death does his terrible work systematically is cold comfort to dying men; but it is a mighty consolation to find that the law of death is the law of love, and to know that the reaper is the Redeemer. When Dr. James Hamilton was dying, his brother spoke to him of "death's cold embrace." Said the dying saint, "There is no cold embrace, William; there is no cold embrace." If our dis-

solution were effected simply by mysterious abstract law working in the dark, it were indeed a cold embrace; it is, however, no longer cold when it is the pressure of the breast on which John leaned.

In the days of our dissolution, when our heart and flesh fail, we shall need consolation and strength, and, thank God! we may have it. He who ever sympathises with His people will be able to succour us. He who walked the waves of Galilee rules also the swellings of Jordan, commanding strength and peace in the trying hour. Wearied with the burdens of life, we go to Him and find sympathy, for He too was a son of hardship and toil; fainting under temptation, He strengthens us, for He also was led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil; and so amid the anguish and mystery of death we have a tender and faithful helper in Him who tasted the sharpness of death when He "opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers." He knew death under its most terrible form, in the most revolting place, and in its direst power.

> But none of the ransomed ever knew
> How deep were the waters crossed,
> Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through,
> Ere He found His sheep that was lost.

"He laid His right hand upon me." John

knew the touch of that vanished hand; he had felt its wondrous virtue in days long past, its softness, its warmth, its energy, and it was with unspeakable joy that he felt again the touch that thrilled his whole frame with abounding life and power. "Saying unto me, Fear not." John was a young man when he last heard that voice so full of strange tones; now he is a very old man, but he immediately recognises the accents of infinite truth and love. So death will bring us a fresh revelation of our risen Lord, filling our failing heart with measureless courage and peace. In dying we are not mocked by a blind Fury or crushed by an abstract law, terrified by a skeleton or torn by a demon; we awake to find ourselves altogether in His hands who is eternal light, life, love, and beauty. The same gentle, masterful hands that built this tabernacle shall take it down again with not a whit less tenderness and wisdom. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." In the light of this text death becomes transfigured; the keys are in the pierced hand; the keys are golden, they open a door into heaven. Thinking of these things strange music steals upon our senses, the rough wilderness smiles with flowers, a light above the brightness of the sun gilds pain and sickness, coffin and sepulchre with gold, and in the

hour and article of death these foretastes shall be fulfilled beyond all imagination; we shall not taste death, we shall not see it.

3. The text inspires deep consolation touching the *issues* of death. "I am alive for evermore." "I have the keys of the invisible universe." There is a limit to the *power* of death. It does not destroy the personality; the dead may live again, live in new power and splendour. There is a limit to the *range* of death. "Alive unto the ages of the ages." In the face of those oriental systems which threatened men with endless deaths, transmigrations, and metamorphoses, systems which modern paganism seeks to revive, Christianity holds that the faithful pass through one eclipse only into personal, conscious, immortal life. The law of death is not the law of all worlds; there are spheres where it has no place, golden ages undimmed by its shadow.

Recent science teaches startling things concerning death. It affirms that mortality does not arise necessarily out of the constitution of things, that it is never a crisis originating within the organism, but always the consequence of environment; and the scientist asserts that earth contains myriads of living creatures which are practically immortal. But strangely enough the perennial organisms of science are the simplest

and lowest of existing organisms; death is the consequence of a certain complexity and nobility of being—the infusoria are immortal, men who stand in glory at the top of the scale being appointed unto death. One of the poets speaks of "the security of insignificance"; the animalcules enjoy this security, whilst man with his greatness is the victim of mortality. But this paradox is not for ever. Christ alive for evermore declares that immortality is the prerogative of the highest being also. The monad is inaccessible to death by being too low; man in Christ is inaccessible to death, being too high. "And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying." We need not be afraid of the universe lying beyond; Christ is the King in those unknown spaces and ages, and He reigns there in infinite perfection that He may bring many sons to share His glory.

"Fear not." True, we can never be wholly reconciled to death. Darwin used to go into the London Zoological Gardens, and, standing by the glass case containing the cobra di capello, put his forehead against the glass while the cobra struck out at him. The glass was between them: Darwin's mind was perfectly convinced as to the inability of the snake to harm him, yet whenever the venomous thing struck out the scientist dodged. Time after time he tried it,

his will and reason keeping him there, his instinct making him shrink. The instinct was stronger than will and reason. And it is much like this with the Christian's attitude toward death: he knows that its sting cannot harm him, but an instinct within causes him to shrink whenever he comes into contact with the ghastly thing, and this instinct will not be altogether denied whatever the Christian reason may say. But in this shrinking is no terror or despair.

"Amen." Some expositors hold that this Amen is John's. He was so delighted with the vision of his Master, so transported with the grand words that his Master spoke, that he could no longer restrain himself, and so burst in with the sound of a grand Amen. John's joy is ours.

XVI

TO GOD

Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.—1 Cor. x. 31.

Jenny Lind once said to John Addington Symonds, "I sing to God." Coming as it did from the heart, it was a fine expression. The famous cantatrice was deeply devout, and these words expressed the secret of her soul. She had a vivid sense of God, a boundless joy in Him, and her music was the spontaneous acknowledgment of His presence and beauty. Why should we not do all the work of life in the same spirit?—"I sing for God"; "I plough for God"; "I write for God"; "I build for God"; "I weave for God"; "I buy and sell for God." All that Jenny Lind sang was not strictly sacred—it was often, no doubt, secular and trivial; but she had ever a commanding sense of the heavenly presence, and sang to the God whose gladness filled her heart. So whatever our task may be we may serve Him day and night in His presence.

What a sense of boundless freedom and joyous-

ness such a habit will secure! Living in fellowship with God, and offering all our works to Him, ensures a wonderful consciousness of spaciousness and liberty. The difference between living to society and living to God is the difference between living in a cage and singing in a sky. Constrained and cramped is the life that looks no farther than human appreciation or displeasure; but to prize and to enjoy God's favour is to soar on eagle's wing, to sing with the lark at heaven's gate. No wonder that so much of our work is poorly done when we remember how poor our inspirations often are.

Life is strong and peaceful if whatsoever we do is done unto God. The great singer of whom we write cared the very least about criticism. Whilst most artists are eaten up by anxiety as to what the papers will say about them, the "nightingale" was supremely serene. "I sing to God," said she, and the murmurs of human applause or dissent died away below her feet. How good it is to detach ourselves from all bondage to men, submitting ourselves day by day unto God! If we follow out the apostolic injunction, and live not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart unto Christ, we find the living fountain of assurance and quietness. Henceforth we are free from corroding care. If His

judgment is for us, who can be against us? If His judgment is against us, His mercy gives us peace.

I ask Thee for a present mind,
Intent on pleasing Thee.

What dignity all life acquires if we relate it to God! There was a certain aloofness and loftiness in the great Swedish singer; and the sense of being God's minister gives to any life that noble pride which is our birthright, and which we ought carefully to cherish. Do we not see on a lower level how fond people are of linking their name and calling with royalty? "Purveyor to His Majesty." We sometimes wonder how these petty hucksters came to possess this sounding title. No doubt the distinction often rests on a slender charter, a mere gossamer thread binds the obscure counter to the throne; yet the privilege is sedulously guarded, and throws a coveted lustre upon the village shop. But how truly grand to relate all life to God, even in its lowliest phases! Nothing is then common or unclean. Everything is on the altar; all is sacramental. Every service is as royal as the golden crowns cast on the jasper pavement. This gives to the ordinary life infinite honour and content.

"I sing to God" did not mean careless singing, it meant that the minstrel did her sweetest and

best. She sang well because she sang to God. So to do all for the glory of God means in all things to do our best. For His eye! His ear! His service! Most perfect ought that work to be which challenges His judgment—most faultless the soul that would stand in His presence.

XVII

THE SUPERIOR OBLIGATIONS OF CHRISTIANS

What do ye more than others?—Matt. v. 47.

The religion of Jesus Christ is a religion of doing; not a religion of mere feeling or contemplation, doctrine or worship, but one of character and conduct. "Do" and "doing" are words ever on the Master's lips. The religion of Christ is, however, not only a religion of doing; it is also a religion of handsome doing. More is expected from the Christian than from others, no matter who they may be. Some translate our text, What abundant or singular thing do ye? The righteousness of faith surpasses the goodness of the world.

1. It excels in *comprehensiveness.* We cannot read the New Testament without feeling that virtues are enjoined in the Christian programme which found no recognition in the ethics of philosophy. Forgiveness, humility, contentment, patience, sincerity, charity, simplicity — these

and other virtues were most inadequately recognised in the ethics of paganism, if, indeed, they were recognised at all. Let an impartial reader compare the Sermon on the Mount with the teachings of other moralists, and he will become vividly conscious that Christ immensely extended the range of duty. Explorers in the East disinter from the dust of ages articles which prove that the ancients had some knowledge of most of the great wonders of art and science, of mechanics and manufacture, of commerce and government; but we know that modern civilisation has developed beyond all possibility of exaggeration the germs of knowledge possessed by the Old World. So in the most ancient literature are hints of delicate and nebulous virtues; yet on the lips of Christ these perfections of conduct found clearness and fulness of expression, they shone in excelling beauty, they attained authority and force. Ancient morality, like ancient astronomy, concerned itself with a narrow sky and a few stars: the morality of Christ, like the astronomy of Copernicus and Newton, lets us into the infinite heaven, with some constellations not seen before, and with new possibilities of character ever glowing into sight.

2. It excels in *thoroughness*. A great distinction between worldly and Christian goodness is the

thoroughness of the latter. The natural conscience has general views of conduct and duty, judging loosely; the cultivated Christian conscience has an exactness quite its own. On an ordinary weathercock the four quarters are distinguished, E, W, N, S, and we roughly judge which way the wind blows, in what direction our path lies. The mariner's compass, however, is a much finer instrument of direction. Not only does it give the four cardinal points, but thirty-two points are exactly marked and named, so that the mariner may guide his barque with severest precision. The worldly conscience has its E, W, N, S, its general notions of right and wrong; but in the Christian moral sense are written finer laws, and in the manifold details of daily life we realise a prevailing sense of sacred obligation. One of the special features of Christian morality is that it extends to the minutest details of life, and demands the highest principle in the smallest matters. The worldly conscience weighs things roughly as a colliery weighing-machine weighs them; in a Christian conscience they are weighed as in jewellers' scales. Or, to change the image, the man of the world measures duty by "rule of thumb"; the Christian judges by the eternal law of love and righteousness. A very convenient method is "the rule of thumb," for in buying

what purports to be a yard of cloth we find that it measures only thirty-five inches, and in selling the same yard it clearly measures better than thirty-six; but the application of the standard yard-measure puts an end to these vagaries. The teachings of Christ render our duty in all things clear and definite; and the Christian life ought to have in it an exactness like the exactness of science, which weighs and measures things both great and small in balances of infallible truthfulness.

3. It excels in *loftiness.* A sublime quality inheres in Christian obedience which is altogether lacking in conventional goodness. All agree that there is a mysterious quality which makes some pictures divine, some music entrancing, some sculpture unique. We call this strange quality genius; and the creations of genius possess a beauty and splendour that distinguish them from all work of mere industry and talent. The cartoon, the symphony, and the statue of genius possess an indisputable and overmastering perfection acknowledged by all. What genius is in art spirituality is in morals, and in truly Christian goodness there is a divine element which gives it a mysterious charm and supremacy. What grandeur breathes in the Sermon on the Mount as compared with Lord Chesterfield's maxims or Poor Richard's Almanack! Christian goodness is marked by a

loftiness that distinguishes it from all worldly etiquette or utilitarian ethic. The holiness of the New Testament is a higher thing than any philosophical morality: it is inspired by the love of God; it is a reflection of His perfection. Matthew Henry says, "Christianity is something more than humanity." Christianity is something more than morality. We ought to be better than the world's bad men, better than its good men, better even than its best men.

Let us often put this question to ourselves, "What do ye more than others?" Christ puts it to us, and He has a right to do so. We say more than others, we profess more, we promise more, we hope for more, and therefore it may be very justly asked, What do ye more?

Let us press this question upon ourselves in *domestic* life. The Christian husband, wife, parent, child, brother, or sister ought to be prepared with an answer. In the Christian home there ought to be a tenderness, forbearance, and harmony beyond that of ordinary homes. Is it so? Are we better than the publicans? Is there light in the dwellings of Israel above the dwellings of the Egyptians?

Let us propose this question to ourselves in *business* life. Christian masters and servants, buyers and sellers, debtors and creditors, ought to stand

prepared to answer this. Our sense of truth, justice, and honour ought to be most exquisite. What singular thing do ye? The singular thing with some of these masters is that the Sunday Israelite changes on the Monday morning into an Egyptian taskmaster; the singular thing with some of these servants is that they whistle away their master's time to the tune of the Old Hundred; the singular thing with some of these buyers and sellers is that they get rich whilst professedly losing money on everything in which they deal; the singular thing with some of these debtors is that every now and then they make half a crown do the work of a sovereign. But this is hardly the singularity for which Christ asks.

Let us ply ourselves with this question in *public* life. Are we the best of neighbours, friends, citizens, patriots, philanthropists? Does that fuller, diviner goodness of the New Testament reveal itself in our secular, social, and political action?

We ought to put this question to ourselves in *ecclesiastical* life. The Church in its unity, purity, and charity ought to stand as distinct from the world as a star from the firmament in which it is set, as a rainbow from the cloud on which it is painted, as a palm-tree from the wilderness in which it blooms.

What *do* ye? What do ye *more* than others? It is not a question of orthodoxy, ceremonialism, or ecclesiasticism, but of practical and handsome life. Some eastern people hold the doctrine that the goods of the dead must be burned, as they are wanted by the departed spirit in the other world; the survivors, however, generally retain the real goods and burn paper pictures of them, trusting that this will meet the case. Do we not often copy this inconsistency, and seek to put off the Invisible with mere forms, paper documents, and worthless ceremonies? It will not do. Our God asks for the glorious realities of true character, purity of life, sincere deeds of virtue and charity. Only he builds his house on the rock who heareth Christ's sayings and doeth them.

XVIII

THE PROVINCE OF THE WILL IN CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength.—Ps. xviii. 1.
I will trust in the covert of Thy wings.—Ps. lxi. 4.
I will be glad in the Lord.—Ps. civ. 34.

The Christian, in common with the great majority of men, recognises the force of the will in the realm of circumstances. We cannot say, I will be rich, I will be great, I will be successful—this would be presumptuous and vain; yet in the realm of circumstances we allow the reality and significance of willing. We can hope to be little or to do little without firm purpose and resolution. So far as character is concerned, the Christian maintains the sovereignty of the will. We cannot for a moment allow that we are necessarily mastered by our organisation or surroundings. In fierce and bitter temptation we are bound to interpose our resolution and keep ourselves pure. The sanctified will is equivalent to all practical righteousness. But as Christians we do not

sufficiently recognise the force of will in regulating the soul's moods. We sit down as perfectly helpless, and permit sentiments of coldness, fear, and melancholy to rule us in the most despotic fashion. We fully allow that we can, to a large extent, control circumstances; we can always make a dead set against temptation; yet we weakly surrender to apathy, sadness, fear, and other unhealthy moods of the soul, as if the will had no authority in this direction. But this is an error, the will unquestionably having a determining power in the imagination, sentiments, and desires of the inward man.

"I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength." If we find our heart strangely cold, as, alas! we often do, we acquiesce in that coldness as in an inevitable affliction. We wait as a shipwrecked mariner waits for the dawn, as one waits helplessly for the spring. We shiver in the cold shadow, feeling that we can do nothing. Now, the psalmist did not look at the matter thus. "I will love Thee" —which was equivalent to saying, I will not allow this ingratitude, indifference, alienation, and unbelief to master and destroy my soul. John Foster said of genius that it has the power of lighting its own fire; so, we may add, has love, especially when in right willing it can boast, "O Lord, my strength."

"I will trust in the covert of Thy wings." Our

heart is full of perplexity and foreboding, and we ask ourselves despairingly, Can I help this? Is not fear a state of feeling with which the will may not intermeddle? The psalmist did not think so. He was not coward enough to capitulate to the spectres of the mind. And when these terrible dark moods of unbelief cloud our soul, we must set against them the power of holy resolution. "I will trust, and not be afraid." Confidence, assurance, and tranquillity are commanded by the heroic soul.

"I will be glad in the Lord." Often we resign ourselves to sadness and gloom; we feel that to fight with melancholy is to smite with a sword the fluid air. But the psalmist and prophet thought otherwise: they felt that they could command the sunshine. We too may vanquish these moods of the night and walk in the day.

We acknowledge, as I say, the dominion of the will in all questions of conduct; we have power to speak what is true, to do what is kind, to act in consistency with wisdom and righteousness. But we must not forget that there is a morality of feeling as well as of conduct. In a true sense coldness of heart is a sin equally with a lapse in action, fear is a sin as well as dishonesty, and sadness is a sin as well as selfishness. The will has a wider dominion than we sometimes think, and we are responsible for our moods as well as for our doings.

The astronomer teaches that the peculiar angle of the earth's axis is the true cause of the seasons—the sweet spring, the glowing summer, the ripe autumn, the dark winter; and, moreover, he tells us that this angle is determined from within, internal forces exercising more influence in producing the aberration of the earth's axis than all the external perturbations of the planets. So also the determining power is within the heart of man; our changing moods, dark or bright, are the result of inner sympathies and decisions, as, upon this astronomic theory, the earth displaces its own axis and settles for itself questions of climate and season.

How does the will effect these results?

To will aright gives the mind the right *attitude*. How important this is! We fail to secure various blessings because we have not the proper attitude and bias of soul. To will aright is to put the soul in position to see great truths, to receive precious gifts. It is part of the preparation of the heart, without which we cannot receive the answer of the tongue.

To will aright fixes the mind on the right *objects*. It may be thought that we can no more lift ourselves into a happy state by willing than we can lift ourselves by the waistband; this metaphor, however, is badly chosen. In the act of will we plant

our feet on God's promise and grace, and thus are we raised into heavenly places. The desired mood is not willed directly, but the act of willing fixes the eye on the promises and power of God, and the sentiments of love, confidence, and joy spring up in due course, we know not how. In coldness think of God's love and beauty; in fear sing of His faithfulness; in every sorrow remember the word of grace strong as that which built the skies, the hope of glory which shall not make us ashamed. Your miserable moods will vanish then as ghosts before the morning lights.

To will aright gives to the mind the right *impetus*. The will is a cause, a master cause. What amazing vigour a resolute volition shoots through the whole life and experience! "I will love," "I will trust," "I will rejoice"—and we are at the feet of God. The will tilts the soul to the sun; it determines the climate in which we live; it turns the tides of feeling.

Let us cultivate the will. It needs cultivating as the conscience does. We see the wonderful things that resolution effects in other departments; let us to the utmost realise its force in the religious life. The Indian naturalist says that when the butterflies start westward they will not stop though the wind is against them and the sea before them; in their migrations they fly

dead against a strong sea breeze, steadily making their way. As this delicate creature resists and triumphs over the wild elements, so let us brave every ignoble thing and temper, being sure of the fulness of victory whatever our weakness.

XIX

A MEDITATION FOR PENTECOST

Quench not the Spirit.—1 Thess. v. 19.

These words remind us—

I. That the Spirit of God dwells in our heart, working for our highest perfection.

At the back of all grand *intellectual* achievement are spiritual forces; a divine power works in the artist, giving him the eagle's eye and wing. In one sense the artist does the glorious work; yet in another sense, not less true, the mysterious energy which takes possession of him works the wonder. The artist is only the instrument in the hand of the Spirit of Beauty, the Spirit of Truth, or the Spirit of Power. Men who have achieved magnificent things in art and literature sometimes attempt to tell an admiring world how they did those things, how they proceeded of deliberate purpose to think out and execute their masterpieces; but such explanations are always inadequate. Edgar Allan Poe tells how his wonderful poem "The Raven" arose out of set purpose and cool calculation. Holman Hunt

describes in a somewhat similar manner his painting of "The Scapegoat." Henry Ward Beecher and other great preachers take students into their confidence and explain to them the secret of effective discourse. But however sincere these revelations of the *modus operandi* may be, we are conscious of their insufficiency: we know that in all sublime creation is the working of a free, divine element which defies explanation. Men who deliver great orations, sing immortal songs, write epoch-making books, or who create marvels of artistry cannot tell how it all came to pass, for they do not know.

Some authors and artificers can explain the origin and elaboration of their work, how they set about it, and how step by step they fulfilled their cut-and-dried specification. The painter tells how he consulted the grammar of ornament for every line and colour, the poet how he manufactured his poem with the aid of a dictionary of rhymes, the musician how he dotted his score according to musical law. The whole thing has been mechanical; it allows the fullest and most detailed explanation; and the craftsman can make everything clear—only you do not care to know. But the work of strange perfection, the work that fills the beholder with wonder and delight, and which the world will never let die—this implies

a large element of mystery, and can never be explained. The great master is inspired, lifted up, carried away by a strange force which is not himself. The orator is himself a mouthpiece; the painter is himself a pencil; the musician is himself an organ-key responsive to the touch of an invisible finger. Materialistic writers attempt to take the mystery out of us, to reduce us to the simplicity of a sewing-machine, and to explain categorically the genesis, the process, and the ending of all our doing; but the masterpieces of art, literature, and language declare that there is something more in the world than mud and motion, that there is a supernatural element in man, the inspirations of a higher world. The Spirit of God working in the intellectual sphere lifts men above themselves, and strengthens them to do glorious things, although, alas! anointed thinkers and artists sometimes fail to recognise Him by whom they are girded.

All this is specially true concerning *character*. In successive ages those who have been greatest in character and in moral action have been free to confess that through supernatural power they transcended themselves and realised the holiness they displayed. Plato felt and confessed this great truth. In the Old Testament holy men declare that they were moved, uplifted, and sanctified by

the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of glory and of God rested upon the grandest, sweetest, and purest One of all our race. Out of the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, according to His human nature, our Lord arose; at the commencement of His ministry the Holy Spirit descended upon Him; and through the eternal Spirit He offered Himself without spot unto God. The apostles acknowledge that their greatness of mind and heart, their purity of spirit, their strength and tenderness, their faith and charity, their joy and hope, sprang from the Spirit that worked in them mightily. So the brightest characters in the modern world—the men who surprise us with heroic virtues, the women who charm us with gracious goodness—testify that they are what they are by virtue of the indwelling Spirit.

When the lame man was restored at the Beautiful gate of the temple, all the people ran together greatly wondering; "and when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" So prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints of all ages address a wondering world: Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we attained high levels, suffered sublime sorrows, and worked

glorious deeds of faith and charity? We have been glorified by the Spirit of God.

A famous sceptic gives a remarkable testimony to the ghostly quantity in human life: "Our brains are not the wisest part of us. In the great moments of life, when a man decides upon an important step, his action is directed not so much by any clear knowledge of the right thing to do, as by an inner impulse—you may almost call it an instinct—proceeding from the deepest foundations of his being." So the materialist is constrained to recognise in human life impulses, instincts, forces, and inspirations of which no account can be given on purely material grounds. The sceptic is quite right. Our brains are not the wisest part of us; our conscience is not the truest part; our heart is not the tenderest part; our will is not the strongest part of us: there is a diviner some thing or One besetting us behind and before, discovering to us higher truths, wider charities, rarer purities than we ourselves know, and strengthening us to do what the natural man can never attain. The best men have ever realised most clearly the direct action of God within their heart; and what the materialistic philosopher dimly discerns as an instinct proceeding from the deepest foundations of our being they know to be the voice of God calling them

out of false and lower pathways into the way everlasting.

Some men can explain their goodness, they can give an exact technical account of their virtues, they can specify the precise reason and motive and force which go to all their fine doings; but such goodness is entirely like the hack-work artistry that can be so fully explained—no one desires any explanation. The moral perfection which fascinates the world by its exquisite loveliness, its noble, modest deeds and services, its sweet patience under untold sorrows, its splendid victories over temptation and sin, and its quenchless courage and hope — this does call for explanation, we long to know its source and secret; and there is but one explanation of all glorious goodness — it is the eternal Spirit of light and love, of power and beauty, revealing Himself in the life of humanity. If necessity be felt for bringing in a supernatural power to account for the *Hamlet* of Shakespeare, the *Transfiguration* of Raphael, or the *Hallelujah Chorus* of Handel, how much more are we constrained to recognise the action of the Holy Spirit in the moral grandeur of Moses, in the saintliness of St. John, in the magnanimity of St. Paul, in the heroic constancy of the glorious army of martyrs, in the splendid truth and beauty of

myriads of humble souls who in spite of cruelly adverse circumstances shine like stars!

"I believe in the Holy Ghost." Here we have strong consolation and good hope through grace. I believe in the Spirit of revelation. He purifies our inner vision, purges the eyes of our heart, enabling us to see the upper world, the saving ideals, the blue distances. Having an unction from the Holy One we know all things. I believe in the Spirit of power. Amid all the weakness, anarchy, and failure of our nature we trust in His mighty energy and grace. I believe in the Spirit of perfecting. The Spirit of the Lord changes us from glory into glory. With this divine Guest in our heart all things are possible; without Him we are swallowed up in dust and darkness.

II. The continued action of the Spirit of God within us is largely conditioned by our faithfulness.

We see in intellectual men that the force and brightness of their gifts are largely affected by their conduct. By one course of conduct they preserve their genius and augment its force, whilst by another they just as certainly dim its splendour, or even altogether destroy it. So with moral life and spiritual gifts; everything depends upon our faithfulness.

The *sensual* temper is fatal to the Spirit's in-

dwelling. "Sensual, having not the Spirit." This is the broad teaching of the history of Samson, and the New Testament shows how the lustings of the flesh are fatal to the fine influences of grace. By sensual thoughts and deeds we quench the spark of heaven as we do fire by stones, clay, or water. Let us side with the Spirit against the things of uncleanness, and the divine flame shall lick up the dust and the stones and the water in the trenches; but if we side with the flesh against the Spirit, the vital spark is extinguished. Anger, wrath, vanity, and voluptuousness are deadly sins. And indulgence in gross corruption is not necessary. A fire can be put out by a little chemical spray or dust sooner even than by thick clay, and the imagination of the thoughts of the heart may sadly darken the light of heaven and quench its glow in our bosom. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of absolute eternal purity; and we must keep the palace of the brain, the sanctuary of the heart, free from all foulness. With fine observation and phrase the great dramatist writes:

> This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
> By his loved mansionry that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here.

But if the swallow haunts only a sweet and delicate air, how untainted must be the atmosphere of the

living human temple wherein dwells the Dove of heaven! We do ourselves the greatest wrong whenever we permit the mind even for an hour to brood over sullied things, whether such things belong to the world of fiction or of fact.

The *secular* temper is fatal to the Spirit's presence and action. Worldliness in thought, in desire, or in enjoyment is directly contrary to the mysterious influences shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost given unto us. It is remarkable that in the Acts of the Apostles the two recorded offences committed against the Holy Spirit spring from the secular temper. "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price." The first motive would seem to have been unselfish; but after the sale of the land and the receipt of the money covetousness arose in their heart. The love of money seduced them, and Satan filled the heart that had been moved by the Holy Ghost. "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee." Love of worldly power led Simon to the verge of ruin. The sordid thought is

hardly compatible with the scientist's vocation, the poet's fancy, or the painter's genius; and how entirely antagonistic is it to the action of the Spirit of God, who strives to produce in us divine graces! The intellectual life demands a certain detachment from sordid life, also a constant sacrifice of worldly pleasure and gain; and this is far more necessary in all who would live the highest life. The Spirit is quenched by the love of the world. The ethereal fire is put out by sordid dust as it is by sensual mire. The lust of the eye will dim it as does the lust of the flesh. The pride of life chills spiritual enthusiasm as sinful actions do. To seek the honour that comes from men instead of the honour that comes from God is to reduce the whole temperature of our spiritual life. Thousands destroy the best inspirations and hopes of the soul by an inordinate devotion to material things.

The temper of *sadness* is also fatal to the free action of the sovereign Spirit. The spark of heaven's fire may be drowned with tears. Sighs and complaints often indicate ingratitude, selfishness, unbelief; and we must watch and pray against these perilous moods. By incessant murmurings the children of Israel grieved and vexed the Holy Spirit; and still we do the same. Sadness is sometimes sin of the worst kind, and it never fails to damp, obscure, and choke the holy fire.

There is a temper of *suppression* that is fatal to the Spirit. We quench a fire by denying it atmosphere, and the Spirit is quenched by denying Him expression and fulfilment. The prophet felt Him as a "burning fire" shut up in his bones, urging him to speak. Said St. Paul, "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem." He was urged by an internal necessity to go up to Jerusalem. So are we prompted by the Spirit of God to speak, to give, to work, to pray, to aspire to a higher, holier life. In all such precious hours let us give Him free course. If He gives us words, we must speak them; if He prompts to noble deeds, we must do them; if He calls to higher paths, we must walk in them; if He proffers choicer blessings, we must grasp them; if He bestows richer gifts, we must exercise them. Acknowledge what He gives, do what He bids, follow where He leads. Otherwise you quench the Spirit.

There is a *slothful* temper that is fatal to the Spirit's grace. St. Paul writes to Timothy, "Stir up the gift of God which is in thee." Literally, rekindle the spark. Ah! the gift that is *in* us, that is the glorious thing. We are often looking outside ourselves for treasures, searching heights and depths for miraculous things, whilst the grandest gift of all is in our heart, even the

Spirit of God striving to endow and adorn us with the riches of eternity. An apostle's hands have not been laid upon us; but God's hand has, and He conferred the gift of a purifying, softening, transfiguring fire. "Stir up the gift." Elicit it by meditation, kindle it by prayer, fan it by action, feed it by reading, make it gleam and glow in sacrament and song. The fire may go out by neglect. And such neglect need not be protracted. We once saw a conservatory that we shall not forget. One bitter night the gardener neglected the fire, and what havoc was wrought! The leaves were black, everything drooped, the rare blossoms would bloom no more. For a few hours the fire was neglected and the floral treasures were frost-bitten beyond redemption. So will it be in our personal life if we neglect the sacred flame. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Rare fruits these! but for their growth and perfecting they require the fervours of the Holy Ghost. Everything is ours if the Spirit is ours; all is lost if by neglect and wilfulness we drive Him from our breast.

"O God, make clean our hearts within us.
And take not Thy Holy Spirit from us."

XX

DILIGENCE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.—2 Pet. i. 10.

The apostle reminds us of our calling and election in Christ to holiness and heaven, and also intimates that the realisation of this appointed greatness and glory is contingent upon our faithfulness. God has put the grandest things within our reach, but we may lose much through unfaithfulness, nay, we may lose all. In worldly and intellectual circles men deplorably fail to fulfil their election; in the largeness of their mental gifts they are evidently the predestinated leaders and ornaments of their generation, yet by yielding to temptation, surrendering themselves to inferior pleasures and pursuits, their magnificent promise comes to nought and their career closes in melancholy failure. Others are born into privileged families; they inherit titles and wealth, are called by the fortune of birth to be social princes, and are manifestly

elected to high position and influence; but not infrequently do these predestinated ones through ill conduct tarnish their coronet and finish on the dunghill. As in the intellectual and social life, so it is too often in the spiritual; souls destined for immortal distinction fail through sloth and sin to make their election sure. God has called us to be saints, elected us to His eternal glory; it remains, however, for us to make that calling effectual. Everything depends upon our faithfulness.

We must be diligent *to cast out the evil things that we find in ourselves.* Roots of bitterness springing up trouble us, and it is not easy to get rid of them. The Canadian thistle is said to be one of the direst plagues with which the settler has to contend. It seems impossible to extirpate it. It is well nigh proof against the most desperate efforts of the husbandman; fire, poison, and the knife have only a temporary effect upon its vitality. No scythe, nor hoe, nor plough can destroy it. Dug up, burnt up, strewn with salt, treated with aqua-fortis, covered with lime, it springs, blooms, and seeds anew. Nothing remains but to blow it up with dynamite. The roots of bitterness in our nature are at least equally tenacious. Our faults are so deep and inveterate that we must bend our whole strength to the task of their elimination.

We must give diligence *to bring into our life all*

good and beautiful things. The apostle in this passage enjoins us to add one virtue to another until we possess and display them in full completeness and beauty. It is not enough to cultivate isolated patches of life, to raise this grace or that; we must bring in every perfection and beautify the whole range of character and action. Most gardeners are content when their grounds include only a few floral specimens of earth's many types and climes; if they can produce a fair show with these, they are satisfied. It is quite different, however, with the national gardens at Kew; there the aim is not to possess even a profusion of floral treasures, but to make the grounds and conservatories widely representative, comprehending as far as possible every shrub, tree, and flower that grows upon the face of the earth. The object kept steadily in view by the authorities is to afford the student an opportunity to study a specimen of the infinite vegetation that comes between alpine mosses and the orchids of the tropics, between the hyssop on the wall and the cedars of Lebanon. The ideal of the Kew gardens must be the ideal of the Christian life. Too often the Christian is content with some graces of character and life, whilst the New Testament demands every moral and spiritual perfection. "Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue know-

ledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." The paradises of God bear all manner of precious fruit, and if our heart and life are to be in any worthy sense the King's gardens we shall need to give all diligence.

Having brought all good things into our life, it *is only by diligence that we keep them there.* "If ye do these things, ye shall never fall"—indicating the tendency and peril of our nature. Constant diligence and culture alone can hold the heights we have scaled, the fields we have won, the ground we have reclaimed. Neglect a beautiful garden for a while, and savage Nature forthwith avenges herself and spoils your paradise. Nettles and chickweed smother the delicate plants; brambles annihilate the dainty shrubs; the glowing roses die, and the wild stems on which they were grafted triumph; the fountain becomes a slimy marsh full of frogs and newts; the walks are grass-grown, and the lawns choked with foreign weeds. As a French naturalist points out, "There is in nature a terrible reaction against man; if we put our hand into our bosom, the garden is in revolt." It is the same with human nature. Slowly and painfully is our life subdued to orderliness,

purity, and beauty; but it instantly springs back if we relax our vigilance. We need all diligence to cast out of our breast the bitter root, the wild grape, the poisoned gourd: then, having brought good things into our life, we need all diligence to convert them into perfect things; and then our utmost diligence is taxed to preserve our fair inheritance from degeneration, from the locust, the caterpillar, and the palmer-worm

"If ye do these things, ye shall never fall." The original is very impressive and assuring: "Ye shall not fall by any means ever." We may do our best in the worldly sphere and fail—many a meritorious struggler fails to reach the prize; but no saint does his best and fails. Give all diligence, and although roughly tossed you shall not be shipwrecked.

"For so an entrance shall be administered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom." When Dr. James Hamilton was dying he said to his brother who was standing by, "William, pray for me." "For what shall I pray?" said the brother. "Pray that I may have an abundant entrance," replied the dying saint. How grand indeed such an entrance! No weakness, no misgiving, no amazement.

"Give all diligence." The character of life's ending is largely within our own power; we are now

determining it. The measure of our diligence is the measure of our victory. Every well spent hour is a flower for our dying pillow; every earnest effort to please God is so much sunshine for the dark valley; every mastered temptation summons another angel to sing in the chamber where the good man meets his fate.

XXI

THE TWO RECEPTIONS

LUKE vii. 36–50.

WE have here a twofold reception of Christ: the reception of the Pharisee, or the reception of Christ into the house; the reception of the woman, or the reception of Christ into the heart. The Master is similarly treated to-day.

I. THE PHARISEE HAD NO TRUE FAITH IN CHRIST; THE WOMAN HAD.

"And He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat." Why the Pharisee invited Christ into his house does not appear. Carlyle said that if Christ had visited London Monckton Milnes would have asked Him to breakfast. The poet was so fond of inviting all sorts of distinguished people to his table, caring little as to the particular nature of their distinction. Perhaps the Pharisee had a similar passion for coming into contact with the famous. Whatever might be the motive, it is evident that Simon had no genuine faith in his guest. The thirty-ninth verse shows that

he did not believe in Christ as a prophet: "*If* He were a prophet." Simon thought that Christ was lacking in insight; yet this was precisely what he himself lacked. He had sight, and could see the woman that was a sinner: Christ had insight, and could see the woman that was a conscious sinner, a penitent sinner, a pardoned sinner. Simon certainly did not believe in Christ as a Saviour. The ecclesiastic had no notion of needing a Saviour. He could see the woman that was a sinner, but he had never seen the man that was a sinner, although he had so often looked into the glass. And not having known himself as a sinner, it was impossible for him to understand the glorious grace of Jesus Christ. Simon failed altogether to comprehend the true grandeur of his guest, and doubted Him whilst he entertained Him.

On the other hand, the woman's reception is that of sterling faith. She was a sinner, and she knew it. In presence of Christ's awful goodness she realised her personal unworthiness. His words had touched her better nature, aroused her conscience, bowed her to the dust. Precious, indeed, is such grief! Legend says that the pearls of the sea are the tears that our first parents shed at the Fall; but more precious than all pearls are the tears of a godly contrition, for

they win again the paradise we lost. Christ was a Saviour, and the woman knew it. She had insight too, and knew Christ to be the Saviour of the lost—knew Him to be her Saviour. Her sin put her far from Christ, but she felt the drawing, uplifting grace. The beautiful plant that had long been trailing and bleeding in the dust found a strong and gracious support by which to climb into the glory of the upper air. Christ therefore said to her, "Thy faith hath saved thee." True, she never spoke a word the whole time; yet it is equally true that she witnessed a good confession before many witnesses. Her tears, salutations, and sacrifice were equivalent to the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and every other creed in which the Christian world has sought to express its faith. She believed in Christ with all her heart—in His mercy, His merit, His might; and her faith was counted unto her for righteousness.

How much to-day there is of the reception of Christ into the house only! The faith that permits Him to cross the threshold is hesitating, superficial, inadequate. "*If* He were a prophet." Stupendous "if"! What a large part that little word plays to-day! Such faith will not save; it only condemns us. We must receive Christ into our heart, giving Him our utmost confidence. We must understand that we are lost without

Him; that with Him we are saved unto the uttermost. Let us not stop short of an unreserved, affectionate trust in Him. Ask not Christ into your house to tolerate Him, to question Him, to suspect Him; ask Him into your heart by a living faith that opens wide the door, and He shall come in and make a feast of fat things.

II. THE PHARISEE HAD NO TRUE LOVE FOR CHRIST; THE WOMAN HAD.

Christ makes this clear to Simon in verses 40–43. Love is the consequence of the sense of forgiveness; and the more acute the sense of forgiveness, the greater our love to Him who forgives. We love because we are forgiven; we love much because we are forgiven much. Simon knew nothing of all this. He did not repent, for he had no consciousness of sin; he did not love, for he had no consciousness of forgiveness. He did not feel that he was a fifty-pence debtor; he did not feel that he was a twopence-halfpenny debtor. He asked Christ to eat with him; but it was a cold collation. His divine guest turned indignantly away from a loveless feast.

The woman's reception is that of the heart. She treats the Master right worshipfully. She loves much because she is forgiven much. The woman came to the Saviour's feet; we feel that the table was between Christ and Simon. The woman gave

the Master tears, kisses, spices, gems, and her hair was the cloth of gold with which she wiped the sacred feet; Simon gave Him salt. The woman loved the Lord with a supreme affection; Simon dismissed the dubious visitant with chilling courtesy.

Religion is worth little except as it expresses the deepest, warmest, strongest sentiments of our heart. Wonderful is love always. Love makes a plain face shine like the face of an angel; love gilds a cottage home as no gold can; love converts worthless trifles into precious heirlooms — a few faded letters, a lock of hair, a bit of ribbon become jewels when they have received love's consecrating touch. And, above all things, our highest life must be the life of love. True religion can never be a matter of ceremony: the living God cannot be satisfied with ceremonies any more than we can. True religion can never be a matter of mere taste: we want something from one another deeper and diviner than flowers, dress, or music, and we are sure that God does. True religion can never be a matter of knowledge: no dry knowledge will satisfy the hungry soul of man, neither can the God of love be satisfied with the best intellectual appreciation. True religion can never be a matter of law: no earthly father would be satisfied with obedience without love, and we are sure the

heavenly Father cannot. True religion can never be a matter of policy and interest: Marie Bashkirtseff said truly, "Commerce, traffic, speculation, are honourable words when properly applied, but they are infamous when applied to marriage"; yes, and more infamous still when they obtrude into religion.

Is there not much religion to-day suspiciously like the religion of the Pharisee—a matter of taste, knowledge, ritual, law, interest, but not of love? It will not do; Christ will disown it, as He did the entertainment of Simon. Our religious life must be full of wonder, gratitude, tenderness, trust. It is only when we love God because He first loved us that we know true religion.

III. The Pharisee made no real sacrifices for Christ; the woman did.

"I entered into thine house." Does not Christ here assert Himself? "I"—majestic personality! Simon, altogether failing to recognise this greatness, did the very least for his glorious guest. But the woman received Christ with a self-renouncing heart. She "brought an alabaster box." She gave Him the costliest, loveliest, sweetest thing she had. We never receive Christ truly until we give Him our best.

Is there not much religion to-day that breathes little of the spirit of sacrifice and consecration?

Nothing really is given up for Christ's sake; nothing in substance, time, popularity, or feeling. We justly measure the value of all things by the degree of sacrifice which enters into them. Even in trade this principle unconsciously asserts itself. The pearl is so precious because the diver has put his life into peril to secure it. The orchid is so costly because the explorer has dared dangerous forests and swamps to possess it. The diamond is reserved for the king's crown because its recovery from the secret mine involved unknown effort and sacrifice. So all through the catalogue of costliest things. And in the social world this principle asserts itself even more distinctly. We hold lightly the cheap courtesies of conventional life; we begin to esteem attentions, actions, gifts, as they imply thought, effort, and denial on the part of him who offers them. Motherhood glows into the sublimest relation because it implies the largest sacrifice. And surely this thought must come into religion. Our discipleship becomes significant as it involves somewhat of the infinitely self-renouncing spirit of our Master. What are we prepared to endure, to give, to effect in the cause of our Lord and for the love of our Lord? The religion that costs nothing is worth exactly what it costs.

Does anyone object that this teaching is dangerous—that whilst the narrative is full of a strange

beauty, it seems to give a tacit sanction to immorality? Let us frankly say that it does *seem* dangerous, and that people may read the story with pardonable uneasiness. It is nevertheless the truest and highest teaching. The most skilful surgeon is the one who comes nearest the vital spot without touching it, who saves life by nearly taking it. Christ's treatment of sin is much like this; He saves virtue by the subtle and sublime process in which He seems to put it in jeopardy. He boldly sets forth living faith and love against dead respectability, knowing that the pure affection of the heart is the essence of righteousness and its best guarantee.

A word to those who occupy the place of Simon. You have not shut your door on Christ, you are not an atheist or a sensualist, you are in some sense a disciple; but you have not gone farther than to open the door of your house. You feel that you patronise Christ rather than that Christ honours you; you question Him more than you trust Him; you give Him something—you do not give Him yourself. Anything less than faith and affection is to come short of the great salvation.

A word to the sinner. Be full of hope. Christ knows the badness of the good. He saw the badness of that good man Simon, the stains after all his washings, the hollowness of his heart, the unreality

of his righteousness, his pride, selfishness, and unbelief. Christ knows the goodness of the bad. He saw the modesty, contrition, and aspiration of the woman, and made her clean every whit, a lily for the bosom of God.

XXII

POINTS OF DEPARTURE

And turn ye not aside.—1 Sam. xii. 21.

Samuel assumes that the true path was clear before Israel; it knew its calling and destiny. Other nations might fulfil their special election without understanding very distinctly what that election was; but Israel understood its mission, saw as in the light of noonday the path it should pursue. To love God alone and to serve Him was the simple royal pathway. "And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them." And Samuel here reminds the people that the imminent danger was not that they would execute a right-about and go back to Egypt, but that they should turn aside. So the grand path of life is clearly discovered to us. To know, to love, to serve God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength—here is the way in which we should walk. And our great danger is not that we should suddenly wheel about, but

that we should deflect little by little. Let us note these points of departure from a higher to a lower life—from faith to unbelief, spirituality to worldliness, purity to laxity and immorality.

1. These points of departure are *numerous*. Many are the gracious opportunities given to men who seek to rise in character; very varied indeed are the events and circumstances which challenge the soul to a new or a more earnest life. Men begin to live afresh, to live a better and still better life, prompted by most diverse occasions: successes, failures, joys, sorrows, new positions, new duties, new relations, all kinds of events and incidents become to aspiring souls propitious starting-points for a higher life. On the other side, from all kinds of happenings men begin to gravitate. Indeed, the very circumstance which conduces in one individual to quickened religious feeling, in another diminishes and destroys such feeling. Beginning school awakes in one child a higher sense, whilst for another it is the loss of innocence and the beginning of evil, proving, as Michelet writes, that the real fall is the day when a boy leaves his mother. Leaving school initiates one youth into a more serious, manly life, whilst another takes advantage of the change to relax discipline and begins to play a baser part. A change of residence or situation leads one to

greater devotion and circumspection, whilst another from that time forward is distinctly poorer in character, the change destroying old habits of good. Marriage proves a truly golden day in the life of some—the beginning of higher thought, love, and purpose; for others the same event is altogether disastrous to their moral and religious life. After Methuselah was born, Enoch his father walked with God; and often since then the birth of children has been the occasion of deeper spiritual life in the father and mother, whilst just as certainly in other instances the little children have marked the epoch of an increased worldliness in the parents. Bereavement is often felt as a call heavenward; but we also see the bereaved sink, sometimes sink fast and far, through the loss of a parent, friend, husband, or wife. Events are always happening which are occasions of the rising or falling of souls, and herein lies the real seriousness of life. Every day brings its possibilities of sinking to a lower plane. The danger of the railway is with the "facing points"; in human life also we are ever encountering these points.

The danger comes from opposite directions. "Thou shalt not go aside . . . to the right hand, or to the left." Prosperity may prove an opening to a lower life; and, on the other hand, misfortune. Intellect may become a snare to us, or the flesh.

We may suffer from society or from solitude. Pleasure may debase us, or self-denial superinduce a most unlovely pharisaism. Directly opposite phases of experience and circumstance prove equally fatal. So vigilance must ever be maintained, lest we suffer in clearness of vision, in fineness of feeling, or in perfect sincerity—lest our ideal should be depressed or obscured, and there should be found in us "an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

2. These points of departure are *slight*. We do not go off at an acute angle, or down a steep incline, leading right away from the Christian course; we simply get a little wrong, and this may end with ruin. The Israelites did not begin with building heathenish altars in their temple, and by making their children pass through the fire; they ended there. They began their idolatrous course with delicate compliances, gentle concessions, which they would confidently declare were matters of entire indifference. The first departure from God is of really tremendous significance, and yet it may appear absolutely trifling. The descent into *error* is rarely violent. We speak of men falling into error, but more commonly they slide into it. There are many plausible intermediate systems and soft transitions by which we are let down into deadly error. There are half-

way houses to superstition. Thousands of people have utterly lost a living, evangelical faith and embraced all the deadly errors of Rome through the beguiling action of intermediate, graduated systems of worship and teaching. There are half-way houses to infidelity. These resting-places on the path to the atheistic goal were never more numerous or more cleverly pitched than to-day. There are sanctuaries where, instead of nails being fastened in sure places, they are ingeniously loosened. There are teachers who speciously teach their congregations to doubt everything except doubt. There is a literature which deftly saps solemn convictions, and which, like the thief in the night, despoils men of a faith infinitely more precious than gold. The "down grade" in belief is a masterpiece of engineering, and many who follow it are all the time unconscious of any declination. The lapse into *worldliness* is usually a process of fine shadings off. The exquisite sensibilities of the soul are lost a nerve at a time. The inner eye grows dim imperceptibly. The splendid enthusiasm of a supreme love dies away as the summer glow dies into the winter through the beguiling gradations of a long autumn. The "little rift" in the lute slowly widening stills the music; but that rift is never more subtle and slow than it is in the lute which makes musical

the hearts and lives of righteous men. Worship is not abandoned; it first becomes an enforced and mutilated ceremony. Prayer is not repudiated, only reduced. The old religious companionships are dropped, one hardly knows how. Without startling shock or alarming sign a man's whole being may be coarsened, and he unconsciously sinks into a life of greed, appetite, or vanity. The descent into *wickedness* is equally gentle. The beginning of sin is always obscure. The point where prudence passes into selfishness, where laudable aspiration degenerates into ambition, where true pleasure becomes indulgence, where self-respect lapses into pride—that point is seen by God's eye alone. Who can discern or define the point, the moment, where and when the legal becomes the illegal, the upright begins to slant, and the soul first warped falls away from its integrity? Insidious are the beginnings of evil. The agents of darkness, as our poet says,

> Win us with honest trifles, to betray us
> In deepest consequence.

The slow and subtle way in which practical iniquity takes shape is one of the tragedies of life. M. Joly has recorded the experience of the police concerning the thefts that take place at the great Parisian shops. "This is the beginning. From a

gallery one sees a woman—rich or well-to-do—who buys a certain number of objects and pays for them; but without asking permission she takes some little, almost insignificant, object—a little ribbon to fasten a parcel, a more commodious paper bag. No one will say she is stealing; no one will think of speaking to her or disturbing her. But she is observed, and even watched; for one expects to see her again some time after taking, as she walks along, say, a flower worth twenty-five centimes. A little later she will appropriate an article of greater value, and henceforth she will take for the pleasure of taking."[1] Amid the glaciers of the Alps an explosion is sometimes heard announcing the birth of a crevasse. At first the young fissure is almost too slight to be seen, and at no place is it wide enough to admit a knife-blade. But the almost imperceptible fracture eventually becomes a gaping, impassable chasm. So is it when we break with good; the great gulf fixed between the lost and paradise began in a flaw hardly to be discerned.

3. These points of departure are *specious*. It seems in the hour of temptation as if we should secure a great advantage by departing from a strict, literal fidelity to the path of duty. When Israel first dabbled with idolatry, they had no

[1] *The Criminal*, by Havelock Ellis.

thought of renouncing God. They imagined that certain advantages were to be gained by intercourse with idolatrous nations, and that such advantages might be secured without losing in any measure the blessing of Jehovah. These idolatrous nations were the ancient nations, the dominant nations, the intellectual nations, the commercial nations; and Israel felt how desirable it was to maintain intercourse and alliance with these splendid empires, always, of course, keeping themselves free from the idols, vices, and crimes of Egyptian, Babylonian, and Assyrian. It was a very tempting position; it seemed an act of statesmanship to secure such alliances; and dazzled by the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, Israel forgot to worship the Lord their God and to serve Him only. They became worse than the heathen.

Very specious still are many of the things which draw us from God. We see a brother who has lost faith in all the grandest truths of life, who has sunk into black and universal scepticism. What in all probability was the point of departure here? The claims and sufficiency of human reason. And how much is to be said for the rights of reason! The point of departure to worldliness is often similarly specious. Care for his family—this is the reason why Demas abates his religious enthusiasm and

applies himself to business. James Hinton said, "Wishing to tempt an Englishman, the devil generally appears in the shape of the man's wife and family." And how plausible he is in this shape! How much is to be said for prudence and diligence! The point of departure to sensuality is often equally specious and seductive. It is a love of good things; and how much is to be said for such an appreciation! Yet just here sets in the rot! Oh, very rational, promising, enticing seem those openings which lead to a lower life! This is what Shakespeare meant when he wrote:

> But 'tis strange:
> And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
> The instruments of darkness tell us truths.

"At Bypath meadow Christian said to Hopeful, 'If this meadow lieth along by our wayside, let's go over into it.' Then he went to the stile to see, and behold a path lay along by the way on the other side of the fence. 'Here is the easiest going,' said he; 'let us go over.'" Many paths *on the other side of the fence* seem to run parallel with Christian principle and doctrine, and yet they lead to death. The fence may be very narrow. Andrew Bonar writes: "Often I have wondered that I did not feel the temptations of Satan more frequently and plainly. But now I discover his

plan. For a long time, indeed for years, I can see that he has contrived very many days to prevent my praying to any purpose. His temptations to me lie in the direction of putting half-lawful literature or literary work before me, which I am led on to read at once, without having first of all fully met with God. In short, he succeeds in reversing in my case, 'Seek *first* the kingdom of God.'" Here, indeed, are the power and peril of temptation to so many of us—temptations to "half-lawful" things. We are drawn aside by objects for which much is to be said: they are innocent things, important things, praiseworthy things; yet in some way or other they seduce from higher duties, they damp our devotion to the highest ideal of all. We are mystified and misled by the specious action of half-lawful things, when things palpably unlawful would not attract us at all.

4. These points of departure are always *serious*. Even if they do not lead us altogether astray or far astray, turnings aside are great evils. A tree grows so grandly because without vagary it develops itself according to its nature; the flower is so glorious because it concentrates itself on bud and blossom; the bee is so rich in honey because it follows the shortest line: and if we are to attain wealth and glory of character we must avoid lapses, eccentricities, obliquities, waste of time and

power by diversions and repentances. But these branchings off from the King's highway may lead to utter ruin. Many a lost soul says: I got wrong there, at that point, at that time, in that manner, through that thought or circumstance. What seemed at the moment immaterial turns out to have been a pivot-point determining an immortality.

All wanderings of heart or life begin in a lack of faith either in the prize or in the path. Let us keep alive, then, an ardent faith in the grand prize of life. "Earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven," says the apostle. Let us see vividly the grand aim of life, and earnestly desire to reach it, and we shall not deflect from the straight line. A weaker faith in God, a cooling enthusiasm in His service, and how soon the feet turn aside! If the sojourner wanders when he begins to lose faith in the path, let us live in the full assurance that the only path to the highest is in the loyal love and service of Jesus Christ. Any departure from His spirit, commandment, or service is a departure from the way everlasting. There was no way for Israel to strength, safety, and happiness except in the knowledge and service of the true and living God; and the same path invites our feet. "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given

us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen." We are in the King's highway. Let us know henceforth no points of departure except for those higher ranges of attainment and vision which it pleases God by His Spirit and in His Son to reveal to us. Each new day affords fresh impulses and opportunities to reach those unveiled heights. Life is not like a suddenly twisted kaleidoscope which at every turn discloses startling scenery, events, and experiences; still, there will not be a day without its stepping-stones to higher things, and there will be critical, privileged days bringing memorable chances and inspiration.

XXIII

SEEN AND LOST

Caught up into paradise.—2 Cor. xii. 4.

In a chapter with this title a gifted naturalist enlarges upon the fact that the student of nature has privileged moments in which he beholds rare forms of life and beauty; but from one cause or another he fails to secure the prize, never perhaps to encounter again the coveted thing. The explorer drifting down the stream in a canoe is mocked by glimpses of rare flowers not destined to reappear; or he is surprised by a wonderful butterfly which gives him the slip in the tangle of the brush; or some bird long sought after is seen alighting on the bough, only to vanish like an apparition.

Have we not a somewhat similar spiritual experience? Our deeper life also has its privileged moments in which it is startled and excited by rare visions. We occasionally see great doctrines, facts, and ideals in a light so clear and commanding that it partakes of the nature of a revelation. They never before appeared to us with nearly such a

fulness of evidence and delight, and it is improbable that such an experience can be common. What surprisingly clear thoughts of God we occasionally get—of His existence, His perfection, His love! How the certainty and faithfulness of the divine government sometimes flash upon us, and we realise with rapture that we are enfolded in a loving, minute watchfulness that will save to the uttermost! How the ideal of character has once and again burst upon us, and we recognise with inexpressible delight our high calling in Christ Jesus! How the efficacy of Christ's death and the virtue of His sanctifying grace have on memorable occasions come home to us with overwhelming force! How easy in rare moments it has been to believe in immortality! These truths, ideals, and hopes no longer appear nebulous and dubious; they shine out in the consciousness, definite, certain, blessed beyond any power of language to utter. The astronomer finds that only on a few days of the year is the atmosphere perfectly clear and the most delicate astronomic observations possible, and rare are the moments when the eternal secrets shine full on the soul.

We are ready to blame ourselves because we fail to retain exceptionally great moments. The artist is annoyed because he did not get that delicious bit of scenery, that face that cottage, into his

sketch-book; the musician blames himself because he neglected to note the wondrous chord he so felicitously struck; the orator is filled with chagrin because he did not promptly secure the exquisite phrase he can no more recall; and in the higher life we are troubled because we fail to fix and perpetuate great moments of thought and feeling. We grieve because we cannot cage the bird that suddenly sings in our brain—because we cannot pin the glowing thought that swims through the soul as a rich butterfly through the summer. Is there not a great purpose and blessing in these elusive insights and moods? We say "lost," but are they lost? Are they not more to us than the thoughts we manage to imprison in definitions? The naturalist gets a good deal out of the things seen and lost. The stuffed bird is a dingy creature, the impaled butterfly loses the magical lustre of life, the rare lizard once bottled is commonplace enough; but things seen and lost preserve their mystery and splendour through all the years—they make the naturalist a poet, they keep him in fellowship with the glorious infinite and unknown. So things seen and lost constitute the best treasure of the spiritual man; the lost chord gives a deeper meaning to all familiar music; if we are caught up into paradise for the twinkling of an eye, all ordinary truths and experiences gain vitality and force.

Goethe avers that no one would stand to look "at a rainbow that shone for a quarter of an hour": the charm of the rainbow is in its mystery and transientness; and the rare lights of the soul are exceedingly precious.

XXIV

CALLING AND CHARACTER

Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.—1 Cor. vii. 24.

The peculiar action of a man's calling upon his character is a subject worthy of consideration. We are satisfied that our surroundings do not necessarily determine our character, as environment directly and indirectly determines the hues of the chameleon or the colour of the bird; but it is impossible to ignore the fact that the vocations we pursue really affect our deeper life. Each department of human duty has its own atmosphere, its own climate, and exercises a definite influence upon the thought and character of those who breathe and act within it. All callings are not alike in moral significance, leaving no place for special precaution and culture; they greatly differ in their incidence, and in peculiar ways exercise and imperil the soul.

Professional life has its own traditions, associations, and influences which are sometimes felt to

be trying to Christian principle and dangerous to Christian character. In the letters of the distinguished French advocate Frédéric Ozanam a passage occurs which reveals the perplexities that the legal profession brings to a genuine Christian man. After speaking of "this worthy profession of advocate," he proceeds: "And yet I will confess to you that these so rare preoccupations weigh upon me. I cannot acclimatise myself in the atmosphere of chicanery. There is no cause so good that there are not reciprocal wrongs; there is no plea so loyal that some weak points must not be hidden. There exist habits of hyperbole and reticence of which the most respectable members of the bar give the example, and to which one must submit oneself; all the figures of rhetoric are reduced into action before the tribunals which only understand this language. It is agreed that one must ask two hundred francs damages when one desires fifty, that the client cannot fail to be right in all his allegations, and that the adversary is a fool. Explain yourself in terms more reasonable, you pass for having made concessions, you have avowed yourself vanquished, your colleagues reproach you with it, your client pretends himself betrayed; and if you meet in the world one of the judges who sat in the affair, he will accost you with saying, 'My dear fellow, you are too timid.'" So

the Christian lawyer felt his calling threatening to the delicacy of conscience. The physician is not without his trials. Dr. Garth Wilkinson speaks of that "corporal cruelty which is a danger" in his profession. And it requires little imagination to understand that the study of morbid phenomena, the practice of surgery, the secrecy, absoluteness, and privilege of the medical calling carry with them other risks than that of blunting the feelings. The artist also works in a realm which tests his sincerity by fierce and peculiar ordeals. Taken as a whole, the heroes, the literature, and the legends of the art world are not too friendly to high moral ideals; the comradeship and associations of the calling are not encouraging to an artist with the highest aspirations; and a thousand pathetic stories relate the bitter financial struggles of painters and sculptors who were loyal to their sense of truth and beauty. So has the literary man and the scientist sorrows of the soul arising out of their special callings, sorrows with which a stranger may not intermeddle.

Commercial life has its own forms of temptation and besetment. Some time ago the papers reported that two Viennese bacteriologists had examined banknotes which had circulated for a few years, and these scientists estimated the number of microbes on this currency at nineteen thousand or more on each note; they discovered specially the

presence of a septic bacillus which rapidly kills animals inoculated with it, this being, to speak properly, the specific microbe of the banknote—it is found nowhere else. Besides this specific microbe the scientists distinctly recognised in the banknotes examined by them eight pathogenic species, among which were the bacillus of tuberculosis, of diphtheria, and of erysipelas. They are invisible to the unassisted eye and multiply at a rapid rate. A revelation like this makes one anxious to consign all banknotes at the earliest moment to the collection-box. But if there is physical peril in handling this paper, what shall we say of the moral contagion with which traffic is fraught? The apostle Paul in speaking of "filthy lucre" opened our eyes to some other microbes of money and to their ravages. Of course a great variety of temptations arise out of business life, but it has a specific peril. We learn that the banknote is infested with a deadly bacillus peculiar to itself, it is one not found elsewhere; and trade has its special virus to poison the soul, rendering it sordid and base. The Roman despised trade, because he found it only avaricious and selfish—it implied no great ideas of heroism or patriotism; and we still see that the natural influence of the commercial life is to render individuals and communities selfish and mercenary.

Whether the commercial man is a great speculator or a small huckster does not much matter; the process of money-making has a tendency to banish great thoughts and fine feelings. The narrowing lust of gold threatens all who seek it. Temptation and peril which are comparatively faint and distant to the great mass of professional men immediately threaten those whose constant thought is how to buy and sell and get gain. There is no Christian man engaged in shopkeeping and speculation who is not more or less conscious of the blinding, belittling, deadening influence of a vocation which concentrates the attention on money-making.

Soldiers and sailors are exposed to a special class of temptations. The atmosphere of "the service" is at once relaxing to principle and stimulating to passion. The life of adventure is rife with unhealthy excitements. And then the restrictions to which the civilian and landsman owe so much do not exist for the army and navy; or if they do exist, they are much less imperative. How great is our debt to social influences! We never fail to bring into the reckoning the supervision and criticism of our neighbours whenever we propose to ourselves a new pursuit or pleasure. Public opinion braces men to unwelcome duties and denials. Many owe much

to the amenities of domestic life. Day by day home sheds its softening, strengthening influences; and although we may not notice them, they refresh and beautify our life as dewdrops do the grass and flowers. We sometimes see how sadly emigrants go to pieces when they are released from social discipline and inspiration. Nay, even the tourist on a summer holiday is not rarely all the worse for the white licence that tourists are apt to take in a foreign land. Many altogether lose their religion through mistaken compliance with the heathenish ways of the foreigner; and when they do not actually lose their religion, they suffer grievous loss of character. But the military and the maritime life in an extreme degree are exempt from the salutary influence of familiar locality and public opinion. "A wandering bird cast out of the nest" is apt to follow strange ways and to suffer sad degenerations. So obvious and severe are the ordeals of ship and camp that it would seem well nigh impossible for men to maintain lives of temperance and purity under such conditions.

The coarsening influence of manual labour is a real danger. A notorious experiment was once tried in America by a number of distinguished poets and philosophers as to how far and with what advantage they could combine practical agri-

cultural pursuits with literary labour, the result of this experiment establishing the conclusion that actual manual toil was not compatible with the calmness and clearness essential to intellectual life and achievement. The pen and the muck-rake did not agree in fact, just as they look grotesque and seem to mock one another on paper. Without question the rough work of life may easily induce coarseness of soul. We are always glad when a machine is invented to discharge heavy, dirty work that hitherto has fallen to workmen; we count such an invention an onward step in civilisation, exempting the toiler from so much brute effort and giving freer play to his mental and spiritual faculties. What a vast amount of severe, unclean, unhealthy, depressing work has to be done in a great city! To a large extent the unpleasing, disagreeable, and, in one sense, debasing toil is screened from the eye of the delicate citizen, but it is work that must be done; and as much of it is noxious to the body of the toiler, we feel sure also that it may impair the health of his higher nature. In the country it is the same. We paint rustic life in the colour of the rose: the cottage porch is festooned with honeysuckle; the villager breathes the scent of the briar, whilst the pure dew is sown on his path and the sweet wild flowers; in the morning

he is greeted by the lark, the evening star lights him to his pillow, and the nightingale sings him to sleep. But we cannot forget the dunghill and all that belongs to it. The work of the rustic amid clods and cattle brings peculiar perils to the finer senses of the soul. It is quite true that the stable, the shambles, the slough, and the slime may be more favourable to a man's best nature than are some gilded chambers redolent of luxurious perfumes; that fact, however, does not gainsay our argument that the foul work which tens of thousands of our fellows are compelled to perform, and the associations of that work, will animalise and vulgarise the workers unless they know how to keep the dust and stain out of the inner chambers. The temptations of the working classes are altogether different from those of professional men, from those of the Stock Exchange, from the besetments of the barracks and ocean; yet they as certainly exist, and if not resisted develop the brute life at the expense of the integrity, delicacy, and beauty of the spirit.

The ecclesiastical life has its distinct and subtle snares. The tendency to fancy that we have great virtues and experiences because the language which expresses them is so often on our lips, the deadening effect of familiarity with sacred things, the temptation to believe that we possess the essential grace

because we have the forms and vessels ordained for its communication—these and many more are perils of a life spent in the sanctuary.

Yet the grace of God can keep us in every legitimate calling, and the very difficulties belonging to any special vocation may give character a singular lustre. Sir Matthew Hale and many other illustrious names prove that the legal life permits and fosters the noblest character. The Church boasts a constellation of surgeons and physicians who have done honour to human nature. James Smetham proves that a career of passionate art aspiration may be blended with an earnest spiritual life. Jenny Lind and Antoinette Sterling show that the public singer may walk in white raiment. Multitudes of commercial men are spiritual men also. Captain Hedley Vicars and a great host beside have at once been soldiers of Cæsar and of Christ. Livingstone proved triumphantly that explorers and adventurers on foreign shores, unaided by any social restraint or impulse, may live saintliest lives. And just as in nature the insects which are the very scavengers of the world are clothed with gold and scarlet, so men who do our roughest and grossest work not seldom shine in a rare beauty of holiness. We have no right to expect the grace of God to make us invulnerable to the deteriorating influences of

an illegitimate calling; but we may be confident that there is special grace for every honest situation—grace that will save to the uttermost, converting the threatening peril into a source of special excellency.

To be so afraid of practical life as to attempt to evade it is a great mistake. Sometimes Christian men retire early from active life, entirely on the ground that they cannot bear any longer the chicanery of the law, the cheating of trade, the distractions of politics, the temptations of adventure, or the debasing associations of toil. We need not be greatly surprised that Macready retired from the stage at the earliest possible moment, that Madame Lind in the very zenith of her fame forsook the opera; but, as a grand rule, most men have little to gain by withdrawing from practical life. No state has greater perils than the state that is without active duties. It is not safe or well for vigorous men to strip themselves of the tasks and responsibilities of life. Those who never had any trade or profession are often the very last men we need envy. It is not in that class that we should seek for pattern saints. And we have known several cases in which Christian men have withdrawn from active public life without any advantage to their character, happiness, or usefulness. Let it be a

settled point that, unless there is something very singular in our case, we need the discipline of a full, absorbing life. The monk in his cell and the anchorite in the desert are beset with darker temptations and dangers than are the busiest toilers of the city.

Of course we are at liberty to change our vocation if circumstances permit; yet it will be well not to cherish great expectations from such changes. We usually discover that we have simply forsaken one furnace for another. Says the apostle, "Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called. . . . Brethren, let each man, wherein he was called, therein abide with God." Here the apostle did not contemplate the precise matter we are considering, but substantially he did. In so many words he says: The station, the condition, the task is little; greatly endeavour to glorify God in it, whatever it may be. Generally little is gained spiritually by exchanging position and work. Let us not fret ourselves on account of our calling and environment. The main thing is to discern the possibilities of our lot, and through patience, watchfulness, and prayer to get out of it whatever it can give of knowledge, strength, and blessing. The New Testament exhibits the saint in very different situations and callings. Tent-makers, sailors, soldiers, artisans, lawyers, physi-

cians, tanners, carpenters, statesmen, household servants, fishermen, sellers of purple, agriculturists —devout men and women have adorned all possible positions and glorified God by learning the special lessons of His grace and providence. Almost anything is better than the restless will that wastes life seeking for new places and things.

XXV

SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL DECLENSION

Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.—Hos. vii. 9.

The Lord had separated Israel from the nations that it might be holy to Him; it was a people destined to dwell alone. Yet in opposition to their divine calling the ten tribes mingled with the heathen, learned their works, and served their idols. This association with the surrounding nations was injurious to them in several respects, but chiefly it had eaten out their moral strength until their glory had become a fading flower. "Gray hairs," says the prophet, "are sprinkled upon it"; in various directions were signs of decay in the body politic. The people at large, however, failed to see that the state was being ruined; they were blind to the symptoms of weakness, the approach of disaster. We do not propose to enlarge upon the subject of Israel's malady and unconscious-

ness, but to note the symptoms of spiritual declension in the individual life.

I. We specify SOME SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL DECAY. "Gray hairs are upon thee." There are certain signs when religious faith begins to decline, when the force, freshness, and joyousness of spiritual life are on the wane. These peculiar signs indicate the beginning of the evil. They are not numerous and obtrusive, betokening one ripe for the grave, but the grey hairs are "here and there," requiring attention ere we are aware of them. What, then, are these signs of the soul's incipient aging and decrepitude?

1. There is *the growth of the critical temper.* A certain critical attitude is proper and desirable in religious people. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." But there is a temper of criticism that is no sign of health. An increasing eagerness to criticise the Church, to find fault with its members and methods, to discuss its affairs with just a little acidity, is a grizzly hair. A growing readiness to criticise the Scriptures, to think and speak of them doubtfully and depreciatingly, is another ugly sign. "Your tongue hath muttered perverseness," cried Isaiah. They did not begin with frank, outspoken, audacious infidelities, but with "mutterings" of perverseness. In the fifth verse of this chapter Hosea accuses the people of

outspoken and defiant unbelief: "He stretched out his hand with scorners." That was the ending and consummation of apostasy; but the beginning was the hinted dislike, the cool acquiescence, the captious criticism, the inclination to see spots in the sun, to pick holes in sacred things, the muttered perverseness. When we begin to lend an ear to tales about our friend, to take exception to acts and ways of his which are really indifferent, to make him an offender for a word, to call him to account for trifles, our affection is unquestionably growing cold, our friendship is being sicklied over with grey hairs. We may be sure that increased willingness to carp at divine things, religious people, and sacred institutions is an infallible sign of abating spiritual enthusiasm and vitality. The habit of criticism grows as faith declines.

2. Another sign of decay is *an abatement of feeling*. A sincere, consecrated soul is rich in emotion and intensity; it regards the good and beautiful with enthusiasm, the evil and ugly with abhorrence. It was said of a French sceptic that "he was hardened equally against good and evil." He regarded good without admiration and evil without loathing; in contact with varying moral qualities, he felt neither pain nor pleasure. Here we have such a man as the apostle described—one

"without feeling," one not with grey hairs "here and there," but whose heart was grey all over. Now, it is possible for the most intense Christian soul to lose its sensibility and to become as callous as this sceptic. Such a process of hardening may be very gradual. Little by little we lose our keen delight in God, our warm loyalty to our Saviour, our exquisite pleasure in noble things, our cordial sympathy with spiritual people and their aims; little by little we decline into godlessness and worldliness. There is a growing deadness of nerve, a creeping paralysis which leaves us more and more untouched and unmoved by the high and glorious things of our faith, which renders us more and more careless about the tragic possibilities of life.

3. *A relaxed conscience* is an index of decay. Hosea saw in Ephraim luxury, profligacy, licence, and idolatry — things learned from the pagan. In this direction, too, must we watch for signs of degeneration. There may be no overt act of iniquity, whilst the process of deterioration is still going on. It is sometimes said concerning a Christian man, He is not so particular as he used to be. This generally means that grey hairs are upon him. It is a serious thing indeed when we cease to be as particular as we once were in matters of character and conduct. Of course

Christian men may grow into a larger freedom of life so far as immaterial things are concerned. They come to see more clearly what is spiritual and essential, and are not so rigid about observances and forms which once seemed matters of obligation. Such carefulness might in the earlier stages of religious experience and character be of real advantage; but just as flowers and trees maturing in the sun dispense with stakes and cords, so the strengthening soul renounces habits which were helpful in its initial stages. It is a sign of real progress, a source of pure delight, to gain this larger liberty of thought and life. But relaxation of conscience is an altogether different matter. Any practical antinomianism is a sure sign of spiritual decay. A growing soul feels more and more the supreme claims of righteousness. It is, as we have said, a sad thing when a man is less particular than he once was about the things of justice, purity, kindness, and truth.

4. *An increased leaning to the worldly side of life* is another ominous sign. The world grows upon us—its interests, friendships, and pleasures. In China great men sentenced to capital punishment have the privilege of choking themselves with gold-leaf or of strangling themselves by a silken cord. How many commit spiritual suicide after the same fashion! They choke the higher life by

the lust of gold, they strangle it by silken cords of fashion and pleasure. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Some who once loved God with all their heart are learning stealthily to love the world, to love it increasingly: earthliness is an appreciable note in their experience and character.

The grey hairs "here and there" indicate, as I say, the beginnings of decay. In many, a word only betrays the inner failure, some trifling act —nay, perhaps only a certain tone, accent, or look. But to what it may grow, who shall say? Grey hairs have a tendency to multiply quickly, and secret venial weaknesses may precipitate flagrant backsliding.

II. Mark the fact that whilst spiritual life is declining we may be QUITE UNCONSCIOUS OF THE MISCHIEF. "And he knoweth it not." "Yet he knoweth not." The complaint is repeated by the prophet with an air of surprise. Men are sometimes unconscious of the decay of their physical powers and mental faculties. An old man will assure us that he is quite as vigorous as in years past. Intellectually he knows himself to be as good as ever, his mind is as clear, his memory as tenacious, his imagination as prolific, only mistaken friends are foolishly begging him to retire: whilst as to his physical strength, he finds it un-

abated; he can do as much work as ever, more than many young people do now; his sight is good—only modern print is so small; his hearing is as quick as of yore, if people would only open their mouth when they speak, as people used to do; and he would go on to tell a great deal more about his perennial perfections, only he is out of breath. It is much the same with men morally and spiritually—conscience, faith, feeling, hope, and aspiration decline, and yet it is possible for them to go on as confidently as ever. Softly as the rot consumes the pith of the tree, secretly as the worm eats out the bud of the damask rose, noiselessly as the moth frets the purple robe, so does the spirit of unbelief and secularism consume the strength and glory of the soul which is hardly conscious of the terrible change passing upon it. How do men resist the teaching of the grey hairs?

1. Sometimes *they make light of them.* The appearance of the first grey hairs is quite a humorous event, a subject for banter. We are not old yet, neither are we diseased; we proudly lift up our head, our eye is bright, our grip strong, our step elastic; it is really funny that first white hair. But for all our merriment it is a pathetic signal. One of our novelists speaks of "the tragedy of the mirror," and the revelation of the first blanched hairs is part of that tragedy. It means that youth

is over, that the noon has come, the afternoon, the tide is turning; and although we make sport of it, in our sober hours we recognise its pathos. Similarly men talk away, and smile away, the first signs of spiritual declension. They have plenty of the right elements in them yet, they are not going to the bad all at once; and when the Spirit of God lifts the mirror of truth and shows them their real selves—their failure of faith, their chilled love, the spot on their purity—they reason the thing away, smile it away, as if little cause existed for alarm.

2. Sometimes we *pull out the grey hairs.* We resolutely decline to look at the fact of our growing weakness and age. There is a corresponding mood to this in the spiritual life. Whenever disquieting signs appear we decline to give them a place in our thoughts. We will not acknowledge to ourselves the really serious and alarming condition of our soul. If we would face the facts of our growing neglect of public worship, our slackening zeal in evangelical service, our irregularity in family worship, our interrupted fellowship with the saints, our less earnest study of God's word, our diminished spirituality of life, and lay to heart these things, there would be hope; but we refuse to consider these fallings away and what they mean, and the interior decay goes on unrecognised and unchecked. "And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and

they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek Him for all this" (ver. 10).

3. Sometimes *the grey hairs are hidden.* People are very clever in hiding these warning hints of nature, brushing them out of sight, concealing them in the raven tresses or in the golden crown. So there are ingenious ways of hiding from ourselves and passing over the ominous signs of a weakened faith, an impaired conscience, a declining spirituality, or a less strenuous Christian life. We fix our attention upon the many unquestionable things of goodness in our heart and action, and find it easy to ignore the exceptional declensions. A man ought not to satisfy himself about his physical condition by a reference to his general health: he ought to give earnest heed to exceptional, disturbing incidents in his appearance and feeling; for the slight uneasiness of the eye may end in cataract, the soreness of mouth or throat may mean cancer, an insensibility to pain here or there may indicate paralysis of the organs of the brain. It might prove a fatal error to ignore an apparently trifling symptom of disease or impotence by appealing to the general robustness of our physique; and men are therefore careful to note any faint sign of disorder in their physical condition. It ought to be the same with our religious life: yet we often console ourselves by thinking of the general sound-

ness and goodness of our character; we hide under the flowing locks the grey hairs which sprinkle us. We enlarge upon our excelling good, instead of noting the exceptional sign of evil and weakness which, spreading, may spoil all.

4. Perhaps *we give the grey hairs another colour.* The Master said, "Thou canst not make one hair white or black." That is true as the Master meant it, but we make them appear another colour than they are. We are masters of capillary chromatics; we concoct cosmetics, elixirs, balms, essences, and solutions, and accomplish miracles —grey hairs appear as locks of jet, tresses of gold, nay, hoary heads shine with metallic splendour, with iridescent hues, like the tints on the neck of a dove; actually the tokens of decay become things of beauty and pride. So we give to the signs of spiritual decay another colour. We do not stigmatise our carping criticism of revelation as unbelief; we know it as "an open mind." We do not reprobate our nagging attacks upon the Church as a lack of loyalty and charity; we flatteringly regard them as a love of consistency and candour. We do not brand our coolness and insensibility as indifference; we fondly surmise that we have attained "the philosophic mind." We do not call our overweening desire for wealth or show the pride of life; it is making "the best

of both worlds." We do not look upon our carnal compliances as walking after the flesh; we congratulate ourselves that we are getting rid of puritanism. As blanched hairs by the chemist's art are stained with colours of loveliness and made the pride of blonde or brunette, so Christian men transfigure the very signs of their backsliding, and glory in the things which ought to fill them with deepest concern. "Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."

XXVI

IMPERFECT ATTACHMENTS TO CHRIST

Not for Jesus' sake only.—John xii. 9.

Much people of the Jews thronged the Saviour; but, as the evangelist relates, it was not for the Saviour's sake that they were drawn together. May it not be true still that some are found in Christ's presence, following in Christ's train, who are not altogether actuated by faith in the Master and by devotion to His cause?

1. Some are moved by *curiosity*. Their interest in Christ is intellectual. Mark the text, "But that they might see Lazarus." To see a man who had come back from the tomb, to hear—ah! who can say what?—from his lips touching unknown worlds: here was provocation for the curiosity of the multitude. So it is to-day. Christianity promises light on various dark problems which are of profound interest to the individual and the race. Hence it has a powerful charm for the intellectual class; and to a large extent that charm

holds this class in a certain relation to Christ. This is an imperfect attachment. We ought to love Christ because we feel He first loved us—because we see in Him a glorious pattern—because we know Him as our Saviour, perfecter, hope. But as we suggest, the interest of some in Christ is mainly intellectual. They regard Him for the light that He sheds upon great questions of life and destiny. He is their prophet rather than their Saviour.

2. Some are influenced by *custom*. It was the fashion of the hour to be interested in Christ (vers. 12–19). One was going, so another would go also. Is it not thus still? May we not say truly that the power of fashion has something to do with bringing many about Christ? We ought to come to the sanctuary to listen to Him because we love His words; but is it not also true that we are in His Church because the respectable multitude is there? We ought to give for Christ's sake; but we give because others give, and regulate our gifts by theirs. We ought to work for His sake; but we attend the missionary meeting chiefly that we may hear Apollos. We follow Christ, not because we are wrapped up in His truth and love and beauty, which is the true attachment, but because we yield to the magnetism of the crowd.

3. Some are decided by *interest.* Christ had a certain degree of popularity because He healed the people and fed them—not because of what He was in His highest character and mission, but because of the carnal good which incidentally accompanied His presence and work. It is equally true now. Some look at nature with an altogether sordid eye. There is so much timber in the forest, so many quarters of corn in the yellow fields, so much gold in the mine, so many gems in the sea. The man is lost in the merchant. We may easily appraise Christianity by this coarse, cold calculation — not valuing it so much for its redeeming grace, moral inspirations, purifying influence, and mighty hope, as for its tendency to increase the balance at the bank, to fill a nation with strength and treasure. Virtues are to a large extent esteemed and looked after as they pay. Men care for righteousness as it affects their health, property, and position. The money value of the virtues determines their importance. The first commandment is that which pays the best; the last that which pays the least. We have organised expensive societies to look after the virtues of temperance, purity, and thrift; it never occurs to anyone to create a great society with orators, schedules, and newspapers to watch over such virtues as good temper, patience, and kindly-

speaking. The virtues which imply financial gain are specially guarded, whilst other virtues are left to take care of themselves. But the pure lover of Christ loves goodness impartially, and in all things. Christ must often look into our muddy souls and grieve, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled."

4. Some are charmed by *taste*. Many in Christ's day felt the beauty of His character without penetrating to its secret; they very imperfectly realised the divine love and righteousness out of which that beauty sprang. It is so now. Men find a pleasure in moral excellence, not so much for its intrinsic worth as for its beauty. It is an æsthetic admiration rather than a spiritual appreciation. And so they respect Jesus Christ, so they respect Christianity. Taine in his *Notes on England* affords an illustration of this. This critic considers Christianity to be a mere superstition; he laughs at our sceptics because they are not sceptical enough. Yet he candidly admits that the practical influence of the Christian religion is fine; and the sentiment of Christianity is to be respected, not because it is true, but because it moulds a heroic and noble nation. "Not for Jesus' sake only." Christianity is

respected because it creates lovely sights; as Dr. Duncan says, "We cultivate holiness as so much personal adornment."

There may be much that is false and mixed in the considerations which cause men to crowd about Christ. "For Jesus' sake only" is to love the saintly life out of love, gratitude, enthusiasm; to feel that in Christ's life is the highest model, in His love the strongest motive, in His work the grandest calling; to live to Him in the spirit of trust, love, and sacrifice, asking for nothing beyond. But many attachments are imperfect. Numbers swell the congregations of Christendom who are not there out of pure love and devotion. Intellect is there because Christ can satisfy some of its hunger. Fashion is there because Christ has acquired social credit. Taste is there because Christ reveals a certain ideal of ethical loveliness. Prudence and policy are there in thousands, not because Christ is truth and love and righteousness, but because in His hands are the loaves and fishes, and they who follow in His train eat and are filled.

These imperfect attachments may be allowed as starting-points in the Christian life. The people in the text are not condemned for coming to Jesus with mixed intentions; for indeed the religious life often begins with adulterated ideas — men start from very low grounds indeed. One is

charmed with the intellectual promise of Christianity; another is tempted because a Christian life associates us with excellent people; whilst others think of the material advantages which follow in its train. Here men may start. Christ recognises these starting-points. They are not the highest considerations, but they are legitimate as far as they go. They are accepted. So Matthew Henry says, "God makes the best of the green ears of wheat." What a good thing that He does! —that He is pitiful to the immature, the crude, and the imperfect! He makes the best of the green ears, and so by-and-by they become golden ears in His garden.

But the imperfect attachment can only be allowed as a starting-point. The true condition is that in which we love God with a true heart, in which we love Christ because of what He is, and love goodness because it is goodness. A youth professes love and devotion for a maiden; but if he too eagerly counts the silver spoons, all the charm is gone—he is a merchant, not a lover, and people say unkind things about him. True love thinks nothing of dowry; the maiden is wooed for her own dear sake—for the qualities, intellectual, moral, and affectional, which belong to her.

This is the ideal relation to goodness: for His own sake. The true state is that in which we

cling to Him, not for the sake of what is profitable, safe, or gratifying, but because of His immortal qualities, His beauty, His love—in which we cling to Him, not only when He answers our questionings, but when He is silent; not only when He is fashionable, but when He is forsaken; not only when discipleship insures wealth and honour, but when it involves disgrace and poverty; not only because He can make us perfect, but because He is perfection.

Not for Christ *at all.* When Franklin offered Whitefield a lodging, the evangelist replied, "If you have done this for Christ's sake, you shall not lose your reward." Franklin replied, "I have not done it for Christ's sake, but for your sake." Are not some of us in the Christian Church simply for the sake of its eloquence, respectability, learning, music, or its philanthropy?

Not for Christ's sake *only*; a genuine regard for Christ, but more or less alloyed with carnal considerations.

Christ *only*—His beauty our joy, His life our model, His love our impulse, His favour our life. More and more let us aim at this, caring less for the things which accompany goodness, and more for goodness itself. Let us do all out of love to Him and His commandments.

XXVII

JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS

The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath He recompensed me.—Ps. xviii. 20–27

In the former part of this psalm David recounts how he was delivered in a time of extreme peril. With supreme pomp and power God arose, came forth, scattered the strong enemy, dried up the raging flood, and set His servant in a large place. In the nineteenth verse the psalmist gives a reason for this deliverance: "He delivered me, because He delighted in me." Why did God delight in him? The psalmist declares that the ultimate reason was no arbitrary favouritism, but that God delighted in His servant because of his personal faith and character.

Let it be understood what it is that the psalmist here claims for himself. "I was also upright before Him"; *i.e.* "I was also loyal to Him," is the rendering of Horsley. David asserts the sincerity of his desire to please God; he asserts the upright-

ness of his conduct before God. He had put the law before him, put it before him in its entirety, had kept it before him, and honestly and strenuously sought to fulfil it. The spirit of this appeal is far removed from pharisaism; it is not an outburst of self-complacency and vaingloriousness, but the legitimate expression of conscious integrity. Some of the best characters in the New Testament bear similar witness to themselves. Now, if the grace of God has done anything for us, why should we not simply and candidly realise and express the fact? If we have kept our raiment white, let us anoint our head with ointment; if we have conquered our selfishness and done generously, our cowardice and done bravely, our sloth and done fervently, let us frankly and thankfully celebrate our victory; if we have trusted God in dark days, let us sing about it; if we have kept our hands clean, let us on occasion hold them up. We are rather shy of using language like that in the text, we shrink as if it savoured of complacency; it is, however, always well for us boldly to recognise the triumphs of divine grace in our character and experience. Nothing succeeds like success, and we are ignoring a fountain of inspiration when we timidly shut our eyes to the clear evidences of the victories of the inner life. It is true enough that we are "miserable offenders";

but, as God's people, we are a great deal more, and it is neither to God's glory nor to our strengthening that we should be blind and dumb to those fairer aspects of our character which are gradually coming into sight and to those newer and fuller victories over self and sin which we are consciously achieving. It is eminently right and proper to refresh ourselves with the consciousness of personal integrity, with the facts of triumph. To the glory of God's grace, let us honestly acknowledge to ourselves and others the growing dominion of righteousness in our soul.

1. *God deals with us as we deal with Him.* "*Therefore* hath the Lord recompensed me." God had dealt with him as he had dealt with God. He trusted God, and God delivered him; he loved God, and God delighted in him; he served God, and God honoured and blessed him. This is ever the great canon of the divine rule.

As we love God He will love us. "We love God, because He first loved us"; but having known His love, there is a very true sense in which its proportion is henceforward determined by the measure of our reciprocation. In the first verse of this psalm David professes, "I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength"; and God responded to that love—"He delighted in me." We often return God's love coldly, but He returns ours with swift and

glowing delight. *As we trust God He will succour us.* The second verse of this psalm shows how David trusted God, and if we read on we see how fully God honoured his faith. Bunyan's pilgrim was told that he would find the river deeper or shallower "according to his faith in the King of the place." So it is ever. A great faith sinks Alpine ranges to a plain, it crosses Atlantic depths dryshod. The lack of such faith entangles us in many embarrassments and miseries. *As we serve God He will requite us.* "For all His judgments were before me, and I did not put away His statutes from me" (ver. 22). A lofty standard! And according to the cleanness of his hands in God's eye was he blessed.

"With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." That is true in our relation to God. According to the measure of our love, faith, and service shall be our safety, strength, and bliss. Are any poor in joy, grace, power, and peace? Let them act more generously toward God.

2. *God deals with us as we deal with one another* (vers. 25, 26). The great truth taught in these two verses is, that God's dealing with us is regulated by our dealing with one another. This is the clear, full teaching of the whole of revelation. How mistaken are those who imagine spiritual religion to be anti-social! It is a common com-

plaint that religious faith is a weakening, impoverishing, disintegrating influence in social life: the love given to God is supposed to be subtracted from our love to humanity; the service rendered to the kingdom of God is considered as so much filched from the service of humanity. No mistake could be greater. God does not judge us apart from society, but strictly in and through our relation to it. As we deal with our brother the great Father deals with us. How mistaken also are those who imagine that religion is a question of ecclesiasticism rather than a question of social conduct! Some people are religious without being good; that is, they are not kind to their fellows, just, generous, truthful, helpful. This will not do. A true Christian is both religious and good. He who robs his brother, if he were clever enough would rob God; he who oppresses his brother would subvert the throne of heaven, if he were only strong enough; he who dishonours or pains his brother would not hesitate to wrong Deity, if there were any door of escape. God does not test us by our ecclesiastical life, but by our social, human life.

Social duty and spiritual prosperity are closely related. Do we feel that we are not satisfactorily growing in grace, that we are not enjoying the sunshine of God's face, that our spiritual life suffers

an abatement of intensity, that our peace is no longer deep, our hope no longer bright? May it not be that we have failed in our duty to our neighbour? When we suffer stagnation of spiritual life, we search for the reason in the neglect of Church fellowship or worship, the reading of God's word or of the sacraments; but the reason will just as often be found in our failure to do justly and to love mercy in our social relation.

3. *God deals with us as we deal with ourselves.* "I was also upright before Him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity" (ver. 23). As we honour ourselves by keeping ourselves pure, God honours us by abundance of grace and peace. There is a true sense in which He accepts us according to our own valuation. If we reverence our body, hallow our gifts, prize our fair name, esteem our time and influence as choice treasure, God follows up such self-respect by great spiritual enrichment and blessing. How can we expect the gifts of God to be multiplied to us when we show little sense of His grace and goodness in the splendid gifts already summed up in our personality? If we defile the temple of God, which temple we are, how can we expect the Lord of the temple to reveal Himself in indwelling light, riches, and gladness? If we would realise the fulness of the blessing, we must respect ourselves and keep from iniquity.

XXVIII

A MEDITATION FOR THE NEW YEAR

The king answered and said, I know of certainty that ye would gain the time.—Dan. ii. 8.

The magicians are in deep perplexity. The king had forgotten his dream, and they could not recall it to his memory. He promises them great things if they succeed in reminding him; he threatens them with death if they fail. "They answered again" (ver. 7). Then comes the text. The magicians wished to gain time, hoping that the king might remember his dream, or that something might happen to extricate them from the dreadful dilemma. Notice the two main thoughts and the suggestions suitable to the season.

I. Time is on man's side. We are often made to feel this. Men of the world know how precious sometimes is an extension of credit for a month, a week, a day, even an hour. Give the perplexed man time, and he will know how to act; give the

embarrassed man time, and he may find a way out of his difficulties. "It is all a question of time." On the higher plane of things this is specially true. Morally speaking, time is of infinite consequence to us.

1. Time is another word for *mercy*. So long as we enjoy the shelter of time, we are safe from the judgments which our sins have provoked. All the retributive suffering of this life is light indeed compared with the retributions which await the transgressor farther on; it is but the spilling of the red vials. "Flee from the wrath to *come*." The fulness of penalty is reserved. This life is the measure of divine forbearance—the earth is a mercy-seat, the sky overshadowing wings. A "living man" must not complain for the punishment of his sins, for mercy here and now forbids the wrath that threatens the guilty to the uttermost.

2. Time is another word for *opportunity*. It is not bare duration that is granted us, but a period rich in influences, succours, instrumentalities, and inspirations. To say that time is lengthened out is to say that the word of God is continued to us, the means of grace, the privilege of prayer, the influences of the Spirit, all the fulness of the blessing of the redeeming gospel. "Buying up the opportunity," we find ourselves in a rich market.

Life teems with chances of getting good and doing good. Many sellers press upon us splendid wares. Without money and without price we may buy that which is better than rubies.

3. Time is another word for *hope*. Whilst time is granted, wonderful changes are possible. The prodigal may return, the maimed be made whole, the lost be found, the dead live! Within the time-limit there is hope for all, hope most glorious.

II. THE PERIOD APPROACHES WHEN TIME CAN NO LONGER BE ON OUR SIDE. It was thus with these Magi; they had nearly exhausted the king's patience. An end comes necessarily to all respites. The business man in difficulties gains time, the bill is renewed, it is again and again renewed; but the inexorable day dawns. So a limit is fixed to the opportunities of the religious life. This is the day of our visitation. In worldly things we "make hay whilst the sun shines"; and whilst Christ the Sun of suns shines upon us we must work out our salvation, for the night cometh. The dispensation of mercy and opportunity is soon past. Long ages may elapse before the angel of the Apocalypse shatters the hour-glass of old Time; but to us personally how soon time will be no longer! "A little time" seems a modest request; yet directly it cannot be granted to us—not a day, not an hour, not a moment.

1. Most appropriate to the season is the spirit of *thankfulness.* All have reason to thank God for the past year. The Christian disciple has cause to glorify God for the magnificent, long-drawn-out gift. A precious space has been afforded in which to multiply our knowledge and righteousness. The psalmist prayed, "O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more." He wished for a full opportunity to gather to himself strength that he might be equal to the great, unknown future, that he might be fit to see God's face. God has mercifully granted us a complete year of privilege and discipline. "Thy saints shall bless Thee." They bless Thee for the sweet spring, the opulent summer, the mellow autumn, the stern winter, and for those larger, richer spaces of heavenly blessing which accompany the circling year. They bless Thee for three hundred and sixty-five days and nights burdened with spiritual benediction and hallowing influence. The unconverted also have reason to thank God for sparing mercy. Job asks, "Why do the wicked live, and become old?" There is but one answer: Because God delighteth in mercy. Oh the preciousness of the kind reprieve! Oh the folly that has wasted it! The year nineteen hundred came as a bright messenger from God; now it lies like a murdered prophet, its rejected mes-

sage in its hand. At last cry with the psalmist, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living."

2. The spirit of *humiliation* becomes us. How much more good we might have gained! "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?" If we are wise, profit in it all—added knowledge, strength, purity, gladness. But we often failed to reap the harvest which solicited us. How much more good we might have done! "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." We have a great work to do, sin and misery on every hand; yet often have we let the opportunity slip. There has recently been a movement for utilising railway cuttings and embankments. These unproductive lands are to be let to husbandmen; it is contended that quite a harvest of precious fruits might be gathered from this waste soil. How many waste places in our past life might have borne golden fruits had we been more faithful! Instead of ending the year with a bosom full of sheaves, too many of us with shamefacedness bring to God only a few blighted ears and withered leaves.

3. The season demands the spirit of ***consecration.***

New scenes and opportunities open to us; let us be faithful, and God shall restore unto us the years that the caterpillar has wasted. If we heartily give ourselves to Him, we shall no more complain of the tedium of life. Whether life is worth living depends upon how we live it. How short are seven years to a man in free, busy life, each day bringing new duties, new excitements, new pleasures! Now summer with its blue skies, its gay flowers, its excursions to fields and sea; now winter with its entertainments and fellowships. The seven years go like a pleasant dream. But think of seven years on the treadmill! No changes, no fresh interests, no duties kindling the glow of the soul. The same hard faces, stone walls, iron doors, grating sounds, insipid meals, and terrible silences. No summer, no winter, no sun, no moon. How bitter the horrid years! Life with God, based on noble principles and brightened with great hopes, is delightful, and glides away swiftly on feet of down; but life without faith, with no large purpose in it, without the sublime sense of lofty duty and immortal hope, is the life of a prisoner grinding in the mill.

Living to God and in His service, we may feel the closing in of life without regret. Charles Dixon says: "Autumn is more apt to fill a contemplative mind with sorrow than any other

season: yet nature knows no sadness in all this quiet decay; each leaf and each bloom has completed its mission, and not one of them will fall in vain." How entirely true is this of a noble life!

XXIX

QUICKENING GRACE

My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken Thou me according to Thy word.—Ps. cxix. 25.

I. THE PSALMIST'S COMPLAINT calls for attention. "My soul cleaveth unto the dust." This is the complaint of one—

1. Conscious of the spirit of *worldliness.* Worldliness is a false relation to human creatures and to worldly things. There is a true sense in which we have to do with the dust—a true relation to the world and the things of the world; but the evil is in *cleaving* to the dust. "Dust"—that is, a worldly life with no divine life in it, a worldly life with no soul life in it, a worldly life with no eternal life in it. The psalmist mourns over his tendency toward such an unspiritualised life. And indeed an unspiritual life is most deplorable.

It is an *unnatural* thing: a *soul* cleaving to *dust.* Alas! a common thing, yet it is none the less terribly unnatural. At the grave we hear the solemn words, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Yes, that is right, so let it be. Like to like—the earthy to the earthy, the perishable to the perishable. But "the soul of our departed brother" is not consigned to the dust; it is commended to God, dismissed to the bosom of the sky. Now, as in death, so ought it to be in life: "ashes to ashes," but not souls to ashes, not spirits to dust. It is unnatural that the immortal should be loaded with thick clay. The living soul must see, clasp, serve, and rejoice in the living God.

For the soul to cleave to the dust is a *dishonourable* thing. Dust is a synonym for degradation, and no degradation can be greater than to subordinate the spirit to things and relations which it ought to use and rule. The essential degradation is to walk after the flesh and to mind earthly things. Dust is always an indignity, whether it be the gold dust called wealth, the painted dust called beauty, the spiced dust called appetite, the jewel dust called honour, or the sculptured dust bodied forth under the forms known as art, science, and literature. It is the deepest, bitterest humiliation to make one's soul in any wise dependent upon the fashion of a world which passeth away.

To cleave to the dust is a *destructive* thing. Dust is a synonym for death, and cleaving to the dust implies the death of the spirit. "Quicken Thou me." That is the language of a man who

is conscious of being some way on the road to death. If we do not watch, the worldly life will eat into our higher nature, and in a dreadful sense we shall be dead while we live. The rich fool soliloquises, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." This man had gone all the way, and had utterly confounded the soul with the senses. It is so easy to do. Being too much with the world, coveting it, finding our pleasure in it, forgetting its higher uses, we lose our spiritual insights, sensibilities, strivings, delights, and become of the earth earthy. To be carnally-minded is death to all the nobler senses.

2. The psalmist in this passage is conscious of *the bondage of sorrow* as well as of the spirit of worldliness. Cleaving to the dust suggests sitting in dust and ashes, as Job did when he was overwhelmed with grief. Let no one think that this is a subject quite distinct from the one just discussed. The heaviest, deadliest sorrow of life springs out of our false relation to human creatures and worldly things. This is not, of course, true of all sorrow. There is a sorrow that is a sacred thing, without taint of selfishness or earthliness, that brings no condemnation, that is as holy as the purest joy, that draws to the stars rather than binds to the dust, that tends only to spirituality,

that renders our fellowship with Christ more tender and brings the bruised spirit nearer to God. But many sorrows spring from an over-estimate of earthly things, and very cruel these sorrows are. If we loved the world less, many woes would cease to consume and exhaust us. If we thought more of the honour that cometh from God, we should be less troubled by the reproach of men; if we thought more of the treasures of the soul, we should be less afflicted by the moth and rust which dissolve material treasures; if we lived more in the higher world of thought and feeling, we should be less affected by the ebb and flow of an ever-changing world of shadows and echoes. Very wise and necessary is the prayer:

> From sin and sorrow set us free,
> And make Thy temples worthy Thee.

For many of our sorrows are nearly related to sin; they are gendered by selfishness and earthliness, and eat away the nobler self as doth a canker.

II. The psalmist's appeal. "Quicken Thou me according to Thy word." This appeal is to the right source. We cannot emancipate ourselves from the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life; we cannot lift ourselves out of the sorrow of the world which worketh death.

1. God quickens us by granting *new insight into the highest truth.* The perception of a great truth invigorates our whole nature. "With Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light." Here the psalmist associates life with light, and in our experience we often prove the truth of this. When our spirit is barren, when our joys droop, when all freshness and fruitfulness of feeling are lost, insight into a great truth revives us as the grass springs in the sweet shining after rain. We see the deeper reasons of things, we grasp the grander facts, we hear the music of lost chords, and live again. When John Stuart Mill lost all interest in things, when every blossom of hope and joy had withered, the charm and thrill of life were recovered by him through the reading of Wordsworth's poems; and if the words of a gifted singer can thus revive a weary soul, how much more His words which are spirit and life! When God opens our eyes to see wonderful things out of His law, the power of sense is broken and we walk at liberty. Conscious of a growing worldliness, let us pray that our interior vision may be afresh unsealed, and that we may once more look directly upon the things that are unseen and eternal.

2. God quickens us *by kindling in us a new affection to Himself and to whatever reflects Him.* When

the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, the power and tyranny of terrestrial life abate. A cold magnet attracts to itself a variety of substances; but if heated, its magnetic force gradually diminishes, until having attained a white heat it ceases altogether to attract. What a wonderful magnet is the heart of man! It draws to itself silver and gold, houses and lands, wreaths of fame, the purple of honour, pleasure's roses, the dainties of luxury, all the while aching with its task of drawing and bearing; but as God quickens the believing heart with spiritual life, warms it with divine fire, makes it glow in the sense of His presence and love, its terrestrial magnetism dies down, until at last, in the white heat of a perfect love, a perfect spirituality, and a perfect purity, it attracts to itself no longer the coarser things of earth, finding its final rest and complete satisfaction in God and in His love. When the affections are warmed with the revival of the purer flame, there is little fear of an overmastering worldliness, and sorrow and sighing flee away.

3. God quickens us by *inspiring us with a new hope.* In the decay of the higher faith and hope the world grows upon us apace; but when the God of hope fills us with hope there is little chance for the baser appetites and fashions.

If we are suffering from any sense of failing

spirituality, any sense of an ebbing gladness, let us turn afresh to the exceeding great and precious promises of God. We are always needing that the grandest things should be made real to us again, and that they should fully occupy the soul.

Can peach renew lost bloom?
Or violet lost perfume?
Or sullied snow turn white as overnight?
Man cannot compass it; yet never fear;
The leper Naaman
Shows what God will and can:
God who worked there is working here;
Wherefore let shame, not gloom, betinge thy brow.
God who worked then is working now.

XXX

THE DIRGE OF THE HARVEST

As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest.—Prov. xxvi. 1.

It is not in every field that the song of the reaper is heard, and that the merry gleaners wander after their own sweet will gathering the dropped ears of gold. Coming along the rail one day we saw many fields where the corn was unreaped in consequence of the rain, and in which the sheaves stood black and rotting, soaked with wet. It is sweet to look upon a field of corn ripe for the sickle; there we see the abundance of the great Giver and the infinite grace with which He gives. but a blighted harvest-field is one of the sad sights of a world that never lacks sad sights. There is something deeply perplexing in the presence of so much fruit and beauty withering in the very hour destined for their consummation. It provokes troubled thoughts about Him who sends the sunshine and the rain. It is a painful jar in the music of the world. The whole mystery

of evil is mournfully expressed in the soddened sheaf.

Life often reminds us of the blighted harvest-field. Sorrow comes exactly when and where we expected sunshine and song. I remember having once seen it snow at Palermo at a season of the year when such an event was rare indeed. It was a strange sight to watch the frozen flakes mingling with the gorgeous vegetation, lighting on the blooming flowers, the gay blossoms, and the odorous leaves. But "snow in harvest" is a common experience in this chequered life. The voice of weeping breaks in on our music. Our life-work is blasted just when it was fullest of promise. We put into our undertakings our best judgment, much patience and self-denial, and, just when we thought to reap, the storm and the mildew spoiled everything. It is very hard for the farmer to look at those rows of sheaves rotting in the rain; and most of us have to bewail purposes which have been broken off, lives which have been cut off, and which have cost us bitter tears. Death sometimes surprises us, taking away those loved ones on whom we bestowed so much pains and in whom centred our fondest hopes. The harvest is ripe, but the wrong reaper comes. How unutterably sorrowful it is when parents have spent so much pains on their children to see them fade

away and leave only a grave! Life has many songless spaces. There is a time for everything, the wise man assures us; yet the seasons get sadly mixed, and the snow chills the flowers, the winter nips the glory of the summer, the rain rots the harvest, in the midst of life we are in death.

We must not feel, however, that anything is really wrong. At the harvest festival the rotten sheaf is not brought forward for church decoration; they carefully leave out on those occasions the withered cluster, the blasted branch, the corn spoiled by the storm. But there is a deep cause for thankfulness even in things dramatically ruined. The wasted harvest-fields of life shall bear everlasting flowers and fruits of paradise. Songs spoiled here are only postponed, and shall be set to higher music. The deep melancholy that creeps over us when we witness perishing harvests, smitten fortunes, and early graves is rebuked by Christian faith and hope. It would not do for all the fields of the world to overflow with corn; the nations would become luxurious and effeminate: toil, difficulty, danger, and loss discipline humanity into diviner strength and peace. The gloomy, silent acres with their mildewed sheaves enrich the race at least equally with the sunny fields whose ripe treasures are gathered into the garner.

XXXI

THE ORDER OF THE JUNIPER-TREE

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper-tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.—1 Kings xix. 4.

And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.—2 Kings ii. 11.

Some while ago in passing through Edinburgh we noticed the procession of a friendly society whose banner declared it to belong to the Order of the Juniper-tree. Many of us belong to that order, and it may prove useful to consider the suggestive contrast established by these two texts. In the one, the prophet sinks in despair; in the other, he is carried triumphantly into heaven. What has this to do with us? It presents in a dramatic form the experience of God's people in all ages.

I. The sharp contrast in these texts is worthy of

being remembered in DAYS OF WORLDLY ADVERSITY. Times of misfortune and disaster not uncommonly induce the mood expressed in the first text. Having suffered the wreck of our circumstances, schemes, happiness, and hopes, we court the shade of the juniper-tree and pour out bitter lamentations. What is there to live for? We are failures, and the sooner we are out of the way the better. But whilst we bewail ourselves, let us not forget these two points:

1. It is only through discipline that we are fit for glorification. Cars of fire, horses of fire, a path beyond the stars, luminous diadems! we are presumptuous enough to think that at any time we are ready for these. But we are not ready. The perfection that qualifies for high places comes only through some form of suffering. The sons of Zebedee aspired to splendid seats in Christ's kingdom; but the Master immediately reminded them that only through drinking a bitter cup and suffering a painful baptism would they be made meet for the great destiny to which they aspired.

2. Only God knows when we are fit for glorification. "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life." Are we sure about this enough? When you chastise a child, you find that his opinion and yours vary considerably as to what is enough. The views of the whipped culprit are extremely

moderate, and you find it necessary to use the rod a little time after his views are more than satisfied. So is it with our heavenly Father. He only who sits as a refiner and purifier of silver knows when the dross is gone; He only who wields the flail can see when the chaff is purged; only the great Husbandman may determine when the fruit is ripe for the garner. God alone knows when we are pure enough to see His face, beautiful enough to enter His heaven, strong enough to share His eternity.

Yet let us be quietly convinced of this, God seeks to prepare us for a great future. Elijah thinks to die under a juniper-tree when a triumph has been decreed him. God is always grand in His endings. Men startle us with their beginnings; at once they show their hand, and after the pomp of initiation we are disappointed with the finish. It is exactly contrary to the method of the greatest Worker of all. He is usually modest, meagre, unpromising in His beginnings; but His finishing-touches make the sublime. It was thus with the creation of the world: starting with slime and darkness, He went forward to firmaments, suns, moons, stars, and the humanity that is more than all galaxies. This is God's order in the world still. Beginning with coral insects and earth-worms, He ends with rich landscapes; beginning

with specks of jelly, He works up to splendid complex organisms; beginning with sober seeds, He crowns His creation with the golden lilies and burning roses. If we are only faithful, it shall be so with our life. God does not end with the juniper-tree, but with the triumphal car. The "whirlwind" spreading ruin is the force which uplifts; the instrument of desolation is the vehicle of aggrandisement. Through mean things and terrible our Creator and Perfecter advances to glorious climaxes.

II. We may remember the strong contrast of these texts IN DAYS OF SPIRITUAL DESPONDENCY. Times of deep depression come in our spiritual history. Wesley's new life began in glorious experiences in Aldersgate Street, yet within a year of these glowing feelings we find that he suffered sad relapses into darkness and doubt; he even wrote, "I am not a Christian now." We feel worsted in the spiritual conflict, losing confidence and hope. Elijah had contended at Carmel with the Baal worshippers, and in a glorious hour it seemed as if the kingdom had been utterly and finally purged from the terrible idolatry. Then arose Jezebel, and the battle had to be fought over again. Elijah fainted at the prospect. It is sometimes after this manner with the Christian believer. We imagine that we have attained a

final victory over our heathenish nature; in a glorious hour we feel as Elijah felt at Carmel when the false priests had been put to death; then the Jezebel within us asserts herself, proudly threatens us, and we are dismayed. It seems as if the power of evil cannot be broken. We shall never be pure, free, happy, saved to the uttermost.

These sad days of humiliation and despondency need not be lost upon us. They bring home the lesson of our personal unworthiness and helplessness. "I am not better than my fathers." Elijah had played the foremost part in an extraordinary scene, and he was destined to continue a great figure in the history of his nation. He was a man of like passions with ourselves, and lest he should be exalted above measure it was necessary that he should vividly realise his personal limitations. And he learnt the lesson of his weakness and unworthiness. "I am not better than my fathers." He had found out *that*. "He requested that he might die." He *did* die. He died to self. The juniper-tree was the cross on which he died to self-admiration, self-confidence, self-righteousness; and henceforth he knew that power, courage, and victory were not in himself, but in the Lord God before whom he stood. That is the lesson we all need to learn. We are not fit for exaltation

until we have passed through this humiliation—this innermost, uttermost self-renunciation. God must teach us this; and happy are they who die to self that they may live unto Him. Let us be humbled to the dust, and yet not despair even then. The juniper-tree is all very well, but we must not hang ourselves upon it.

You wail, I shall never be fully recovered to God, I shall never reach heaven. Be of good courage, you shall. A great multitude in white raiment stand above us, and in due season we shall join them. They were lifted into a heaven of purity, a heaven of power, a heaven of eternal blessedness; and in the fulness of the time we shall share their triumph. "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." What a dismal ending some of us cut out for ourselves! If we think of horses, it is about the black ones with long tails; the only chariots we discern are bath-chairs and hearses; our vision is bounded by the cemetery wall. Yet how different shall it be! Elijah did not see death, and to us in a no less glorious sense shall death be swallowed up in victory.

III. We may remember the strong contrast of our texts IN DAYS WHEN WE ARE DISAPPOINTED BY THE RESULTS OF OUR EVANGELICAL WORK. Elijah

was smitten with despair about God's cause. The scornful, scorching words of the wicked and wrathful queen unmanned him. All his grand hopes for his nation and race were to expire at the juniper-tree. And very often do the strongest and best of men entertain similar misgivings. Eternal justice threatens to fail; iniquity seems to outmatch truth and righteousness; the most passionate and decisive efforts to bless and save end apparently in abject discomfiture. Many and strange are the disasters which overtake spiritual endeavours. Sterling workers are snatched away in the crisis when their presence and influence are most vital; resources are dried up just when most needed; persecution breaks out and the fields are blighted in the very hour when they begin to bloom. Infernal ingenuity and wrath perpetually embarrass and checkmate the kingdom of God. It is not merely the ordinary difficulty attending every kind of endeavour in this world of change and chance; an extraordinary, mysterious hostility and fatality seem to pursue all noble and evangelical effort and to plot its ruin. Before these ever-recurring and disheartening arrestments and collapses of the work of God the faith of His servants is ready to fail. Mocked by the irony of events, exhausted by ploughing the sands, disenchanted and paralysed by unexpected

reverses and postponements, the boldest and most zealous workers are confounded.

Yet Elijah was wrong. God works strangely, He works silently, He works slowly, but He works surely. The funeral was not to be that of Elijah. Let us see the end of Ahab. "And a certain man drew his bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness. . . . So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; and they buried the king in Samaria. And they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; (now the harlots washed themselves there;) according unto the word of the Lord which He spake" (1 Kings xxii. 34–38, R.V.). Now see the end of Jezebel. "And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her eyes, and tired her head, and looked out at the window. . . . And Jehu said, Throw her down. So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot. . . . And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands" (2 Kings ix. 30–37). And now turn to the translation of Elijah. "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and

Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." A triumphal ascent to glory, honour, and immortality. It shall be thus to the end of the world. The juniper-tree is sometimes the halting-place of God's kingdom, but never its terminus. The Church ends with horses and chariots of fire.

The one thing we must resolve upon is not to reason and question, but confidently to follow out all the lines and leadings of God in spiritual life and evangelical toil. It is the fashion with some modern novelists to finish their stories in the most atheistic and despairing manner—the mystery and struggle of life ending in unconsoled sorrows, unrequited sacrifices, uncompensated wrongs, unanswered prayers and strivings; the palpable moral of such treatment being that there is no law, government, or purpose in human life. We know otherwise. We believe in the programme of God, so wise, so true, so good; and in our best moments we are confident that His programme cannot fail. It is irrational to stand still and doubtfully reason in the dark crises of experience and service. It is as if the embryo in the half-hatched egg should attempt to reason out its strange situation; or as if the chrysalis should demand an explanation of its mysterious lot; or as if a flower stalk, half-way to death, half-way to beauty, should resist any further change until it got light on the problem of

its being. In certain stages of obscure transition and development nothing is to be said; it is altogether a question of duty, of duty silently, steadily, persistently done. Then it is not long before the lark is in the sky, the butterfly on the flower, the rose in the sun, the saint in paradise. See through the juniper branches the green immortal palms; go forward in the name and strength of God.

XXXII

UNCAGED BIRDS

There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth.—Prov. xi. 24.

A GOLD medal was recently awarded Herr von Prosch for his success in introducing tropical birds into German forests. Disliking to keep his pets in cages, his canaries were first liberated in a large room, then allowed to pass out and in through small windows, always getting their food within. The birds soon began to build nests outside, and to rear their young there. Two pairs of South American parrots were next set free, and during the summer they raised a brood of young which, with the old birds, passed safely through the exceptionally severe winter. This new bird colony is situated in southern Saxony, and is being watched with great interest. One rejoices to read intelligence of this kind, for rare things and creatures are not often given to the public in this way. It is refreshing to hear of the fortunate possessor of these

beautiful creatures letting loose in the sombre forest painted birds of the sun.

But does not the fine conduct of the German naturalist remind us that a large part of our common duty is to get bright and blessed things into quarters where they are sadly needed? Instead of nursing our possessions in the spirit of covetousness, jealousy, and pride, instead of using them only for personal gratification, must we not seek to enrich the world with them? To many of us God has given precious gifts, and we lock up our paragons, selfishly feasting on their loveliness and song. We may rejoice, however, that such exclusiveness is not, after all, the characteristic of our day. The community has been largely baptized with the spirit of unselfishness; and even the newspapers, which so often record our sordid greed, are beginning day by day to chronicle outbursts of splendid charity. The act of the humane naturalist in liberating his lovely birds is happily paralleled nearer home by deeds of grace in other spheres. For ages nobles and millionaires have kept their art treasures in closely guarded galleries, seen only by the privileged few; but in our day a more enlightened and generous temper prevails, and these splended heirlooms are freely exhibited. Pictures, statues, cabinets, exquisite work of the loom and goldsmith, long sequestrated, as oriental birds are preserved in royal

aviaries, have become familiar to the multitude; the cartoons of Belgravia illuminate Whitechapel; the burnished songsters of the Orient perch where only gutter sparrows were seen before. And in other ways rich men open their cages and allow their less fortunate fellows to share in the things of rarity and beauty.

Flower distribution is another expression of the same spirit. Choice growths now find their way from conservatories to the window-sill of the poor, to the bedside of the sick, and to all sorts of forlorn and dingy corners. Legend relates that flowers once had language, but through a sad fatality they were struck dumb. Christ, however, made the lilies speak again, and many a grand message is breathed from their sweet lips. A little while ago we saw a troop of old pauper women returning through the London streets after a day in the country, and very lovingly they bore back into the bare life of the workhouse the posies gathered in the summer fields. The "flower missions" of our day distributing in slums and hospitals the dewy blooms of far-off gardens is no mean thing in the eyes of Him who scattered the jewels of the grass. It is granted that to throw the indigent and suffering a flower would not avail much if it were intended as a substitute for more substantial relief; but the cheering truth is, that these

missions are felicitous symbols of the growing humanity of the age, which strives in a thousand ways to succour misery's sons and daughters.

The Book Fund and its Work by Mrs. Spurgeon shows that widely extended good is achieved by this delicate lady through her generous distribution of her late husband's books. How much instruction, comfort, impulse they bring into many a needy pastor's study, intellectual and spiritual treasure in turn to be communicated to the congregation! A poor pastor's meagre library is a pathetic sight, what little there is on the scanty shelves having been secured by real sacrifice. The loving beneficence which scatters the goodly volumes of the great preacher reminds us of the kindly naturalist irradiating the dim woods with golden and scarlet birds. Some bookcases are like cages in which winged captives are seen drooping behind the bars. Very grateful and helpful to many is the gift or loan of a well selected book; yet people who have more literature than they know what to do with forget this form of generosity. The wonderful creatures whose wings are silver and whose feathers are yellow gold are imprisoned in a mahogany cabinet when they might be at large, delighting hungry eyes and ears with beauty and music.

Wealth is frequently penned up when it might be set free to bring bread and blessing into needy

places. We have wonderful cages of steel and stone, where it is immured through long years, rendering us and the world little service. Evil things are bred of such hoarding. "As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich." How these guinea-fowl would brighten many a desolate spot—social, intellectual, or spiritual! Of course charity must be cautious. The public-spirited ornithologist did not recklessly fling his birds into the air; if he had, they would have straightway perished without doing any good. He spared no pains to fit the strangers for their new home. And so a wise philanthropy works wonders. It can minister to the thousand wants of those who in city and village feel the cruel severity of life; it can instruct, console, heal, reclaim, defend, save. It can send forth a cloud of doves across the sea, carrying sweet messages of peace and life to nations sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. Vast and benign is the power of consecrated wealth. In charity more than in anything else it is true that "money answereth all things." The socialism that would spoil the rich is blackmail rhetorically expressed, and ought to be penalised by the treadmill as blunt robbery is; but the humanity that sacrifices its own for another is humanity at its best.

It required some courage in the warm-hearted German to commit his charming birds to the woods. The prudent, clever people would no doubt be against him, and call him what long before they called another German enthusiast, Joseph Wolff, a "bird-fool." These calculating ones, seeing the living glories take flight, would scoff at the romantic act of an amiable fanatic. Unfamiliar flowers are immediately uprooted; an infrequent bird is promptly shot; a rare butterfly has a pin run through it. Fashion, curiosity, vanity, and selfishness prey on unique things, and poachers might soon be expected to snare or shoot these birds of beauty. Or if they escape the sportsman they must succumb to the climate. Yet, after all prognostications, the result seems to have justified the philanthropist's romantic speculation; he has succeeded in naturalising the gay children of the sun. How easy it is to criticise and mock, how easy to show the folly and futility of attempting almost any kind of good! Mr. Worldly Wiseman can demonstrate triumphantly the unwisdom, nay, the wickedness of charity; the greedy poor eat whatever they get, and after food are hungrier than before. Religion is felt by others to be too dainty a thing for the rough world, its ideals, principles, and graces being too ethereal. Did not someone object a while ago that the sayings of the

Sermon on the Mount were too rare for the common herd? The birds of heaven which sing in the trees of Lebanon, which make their nests by the altars of Zion, must not be incontinently let loose in the savage wilderness. The rarities of cloistered saints and ethical connoisseurs are not to be thrust on the workaday multitude. And when the Church would proclaim its grand doctrines in pagan lands, how earnestly the philosophers assure us that the climate will not suit them! This is the worst sort of infidelity, and we must resist it. We must let our love-birds loose in the realms of selfishness and hatred, turn our sun-birds into the haunts of misery, our turtle into a world of strife, our phœnix into the haunts of dark despair, and once more speed the dove across the waters. These birds of heaven have more vitality and robustness than some people think, and in due time they will drive out the obscene brood of the night. The inspirations of faith, the ingenuities of love, the power of sacrifice, the invincibility of patience will prevail and fill the whole sphere with charm and melody. The grand work of the Church of God is to make her precious things common, to establish the highest principles as the rule of the multitude, to deck the poor with the graces of the saints, to share her glorious hopes with the redeemed race.

The German ornithologist is none the poorer for his poetic kindness, for his originality of beneficence. Every bush, brake, copse, and forest will become his aviary. In the birds that flash like fire in gloomy depths, that gleam in the sky as streaks of rainbow, that give the boughs a colour beyond their blossoms, that light up the grass as the glowing flowers do—in all the glitter and flutings of the wide woodland the kindly philanthropist will realise a real and an intense proprietorship. We possess and multiply riches and joy by being faithful stewards of the talents entrusted to us. How slow we are to understand that only through sympathy and sacrifice do the things which are conventionally ours become really ours! Christ gave us a new standard of proprietorship—the real standard: He taught us that we possess as we share. The prized birds cramped in narrow cages are not ours; they are ours only when liberated, when they shine and sing for a larger world: transformed and transfigured in the light of love, our two sparrows sold for a farthing shine with the infinite hues of trogon, toucan, and macaw, and warble with notes welcome at heaven's gate. Moreover, the German savant received a gold medal from his king. Heaven also gives golden recompense to such as these.

XXXIII

BAD DAYS

That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.— EPH. vi. 13

RECENTLY I looked over some of my old copybooks, written more than fifty years ago, and I am bound to say that, on the whole, they are very creditable. The rising generation pays little heed to penmanship; indeed, we are expected to infer that the more unintelligible the scribble the more complete the culture of the scribbler. In the old days it was different; whatever else the schoolmaster might or might not teach, the pupil was trained to write clearly and even elegantly; a pride of penmanship prevailed that might be revived with advantage. But these exemplary copybooks contain bad pages which it is impossible to overlook. Once or twice, perhaps, in each number occurs a scribbled, blotted, stained, tear-smeared leaf, altogether at variance with the generally fair workmanship; one might almost think that it had been interpolated by a strange hand. These erratic portions are

very strange to look at, suggestive of many things. The best of men have similarly bad days, every now and then painfully failing. Workers of all kinds are conscious of seasons when they are far below their true selves, and when their work is weak, irregular, and blundering—the painter's pencil is on strike, the orator's tongue cleaves to the roof of his mouth, the right hand of the artisan misses its cunning; and the higher life is in this respect at least a counterpart of the intellectual life. The diaries of the saints reveal days when they unaccountably break down, and everything goes wrong. The usually pleasant pages are interrupted by unhappy records, by outbursts of temper and murmuring, and sullied by tears of vexation and unbelief. There are days when a rot of selfishness sets in, marring the magnanimity of the soul; days when in the dubious bout the body gets the upper hand, and the spirit fails to do the things that it would; days when the temper is sour, sulky, sultry; black-letter days, marked by stinginess, uncharitableness, unmercifulness; days when we fall into painful questionings and scepticisms; days in which we are conscious of the failure of high, pure motive; days deeply disturbed and unhappy. We are not at these times what we usually know ourselves to be, not what our friends expect to find us. We are below our best self, decidedly below

our average self. In the biographies of Scripture bad days darken lives otherwise bright and blameless; and although in current biographical writing these unlovely times may not always be duly and candidly recorded, yet we are sure that more or less all God's people know the sad and sorrowful moods which surprise as snow in summer. Autobiography, which is a later copybook, has its pages marked by regretful characters, as the earlier copybooks have their pathetic disfigurations.

What is the explanation of these bad days? What was the matter that day in the schoolroom? Weather? health? temper? wilfulness? It is impossible now to discern the immediate cause of the blurred copy; but there the unfortunate copy is real enough and sad enough. What is the ultimate explanation of the days of failure in our spiritual life? Little things, very little things, may be the *occasion* of these distressing days. It is surprising what slight incidents put an athlete off his play, confuse an orator, or spoil the music of the greatest master; the merest accident disconcerts them and issues in a bad time remembered with vexation and shame for years. And trifles are apparently accountable for the bad days of our religious life. The barometer is supposed to dominate our temper; a slight lack of tact in a companion or servant

occasions our unlovely and undignified conduct; a bodily ache or pain explains our fretfulness and gloom. Little is necessary to provoke us and to cause us to reveal ourselves in an unhandsome aspect. But however slight the occasion, the *cause* of these unhappy days usually lies deep within. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse Thou me from secret faults." I am strongly of opinion that the bad handwriting in the copybook, so lamentably loose, so shamefully smeared, departing so widely from the straight lines, falling so seriously below the ideal and standard of the copperplate on the top line—I am strongly of opinion, I say, that all this was the culpable result of a fit of temper, heedlessness, laziness, or defiance. Depend upon it that whatever apology the youthful scholar offered for the smudged page, it was the outcome of some wickedness or other; so at least the old man judges. The black blots and reckless calligraphy of the faded leaf awake the consciousness that there is more than meets the eye, and we pray with the psalmist, "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to Thy mercy remember Thou me for Thy goodness' sake, O Lord." Time is the best commentator on some texts, and we think it is here. So we must not too lightly explain away the bad pages of our later history. We are prone

to explain our moods and doings by meteorological conditions, by physiological and psychological peculiarities, and by the force of circumstances; but we must remember that it is still true, "out of the heart are the issues of life," and the strange defects and failures which compromise the saints have their beginning in secret flaws of the spirit.

We do not believe that God will judge us altogether by the bad pages. It is a stern retribution that some of our fellows see us only on one of our bad days, and ever after judge us accordingly. We can hardly complain, perhaps; they took a snapshot on the only occasion that offered, and the portrait, though ugly, is true, and we are remembered by it. They caught the scornful lip, the moody temper, the proud forehead, the countenance distorted and discoloured by anger or jealousy, and that is their abiding picture of us. It is as if they had seen a performer when off his true form, as if they had visited a pleasant landscape on a miserable day; and they conceive an unfavourable opinion of the man and the place, an opinion not easily got rid of. This may teach us not to judge people by a fugitive interview, although we cannot seriously complain that we are remembered as we really were. Even some who know us well judge us by our worst, and not by our best. They recall the exceptional hastiness, un-

courteousness, uncharitableness, intemperance, and give little prominence to the fair average. Can this be right? I do not judge that old copybook by its worst page; and I must not judge my brother by the melancholy lapse. It is comforting and strengthening to think of the just and generous judgment of God. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward His name." In the day of our weakness and blundering God remembers and hopes, so we live to write our story in fairer characters.

Our bad days are, nevertheless, subjects for serious consideration. They indicate retrograde and perilous elements of character, which call for watchfulness. A Manchester photographer relates that he once took a photograph of a child who was apparently in good health and had a clear skin. The negative showed the face to be thickly covered with an eruption. Three days afterwards the child was covered with spots due to prickly heat. The camera had detected and photographed the eruption three days before it was visible to the naked eye. Another case of a similar kind is recorded where a child showed spots on his portrait which were invisible on his face a fortnight previous to an attack of smallpox. May we not regard the bad days in our spiritual history as subtle expressions of

evil humours, affinities, and possibilities, which, if not wisely and promptly checked, will by-and-by declare themselves in grosser and deadlier manifestations? In the future the camera may be employed to detect disease in its very earliest stages and obscure revealings; and we may well see in the strange, unpleasant hours of our religious life premonitions of evils which, when fully grown, destroy the soul's health and life. Bad days have a tendency to protract themselves, to multiply and to intensify themselves. We ought, by God's grace, to strive mightily to prevent these days. For our soul's sake, and for the sake of God's cause, we ought to strive to this end. In one bad day we may destroy much good by giving people a poor conception of our religion; we may easily become a stumbling-block to weak and less instructed souls. Fully awake and devoted, every day in the spiritual life will be a red-letter day.

XXXIV

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.—Hos. xiv. 5–7.

In this beautiful passage several aspects of spiritual growth are illustrated by lovely images. Coleridge defined genius as "the faculty of growth"; goodness belongs to the same order, and may be similarly defined. It is ever "becoming," changing into a more complete and diviner thing.

There is growth in *purity*: "He shall grow as the lily." A glance into our heart will show how much room there is for growth in this quality; and we have only to look into God's word to find the great and precious promises which justify the largest expectations. Some say that in a luminous hour, by an act of realising, compelling faith, we find entire cleanness of heart, whilst others insist

that only by slow developments do we blossom into the purity and loveliness of the lily. Wesley believed in both processes—instantaneousness and growth: "I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by faith, by a simple act of faith; consequently in an instant: But I believe a gradual work, both preceding and following that instant."[1] Wesley felt no inconsistency or contradiction in recognising both processes in the complete hallowing of the soul; neither is there. The flower, slowly perfected in the bud, opens in a morning; and deep and silent purifications proceed within the soul, revealing themselves in exalted and glorious hours. The gift received in faith was preceded by a gracious preparation, and the gift received in faith is slowly realised in its fulness of meaning in after-years. We must expect growth in clearness of insight, in increasing freedom from pride and self, in new blossomings in purity of thought, motive, and life. And let us not stay to discuss the method of sanctification; rather let us seek to think ourselves, to pray ourselves, to believe ourselves into it. How strangely do some Christian people revolt from the doctrine of perfect purity of heart and life! The translation of a work by the present writer was rejected by the committee of a religious society, because of the "tincture of

[1] Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, vol. ii. p. 443.

perfectionism" which pervaded a number of its assertions, and because of "its lack of the recognition of man's inherent sinfulness even when regenerate." So sacred a thing is the carnal mind! We must plead for and jealously guard the inherent sinfulness of the regenerate! We have been taught a truer doctrine. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

There is a growth in *depth*: "And cast forth his roots as Lebanon." Not merely the deeply rooted forest of Lebanon is intended, but the roots of the mountain itself, as one of the foundations of the earth. How little many of us read, meditate, or pray! And this is the reason that our branches are bare, that we wither at the top. We want more pondering in our heart, more of that secret assimilation which takes fast hold of the eternal grounds of reason and righteousness. The plants which grow in the Alps are, as a rule, firmly and largely rooted. This enables them to withstand the rough winds of exposed situations, and also allows them to make the greatest possible use of scanty supplies of nutriment in the often arid soil. An authority on this subject writes: "Mountains are often bare, and cliffs are usually devoid of soil; but we must not conclude therefrom that the choice jewellery of plant life scattered over the ribs of the mountain or the interstices of

the crag live upon little more than the mountain air and the melting snow. Can you gauge the depth of that narrow chink from which peep tufts of the beautiful *Androsace helvetica*? No; it has gathered the crumbling grit and scanty soil for ages and ages, and the roots enter so far that nothing the tourist carries with him can bring out enough of them to enable the plant to exist elsewhere. And suppose we find plants growing apparently from mere cracks without soil. If so, the roots simply search farther into the heart of the flaky rock, so that they are safer from any want of moisture than if in the best and deepest soil." It is much the same with the Christian character. Whenever we find strength and beauty of character, we may be sure that they spring from depth of soul, that the fibres have struck deep in the everlasting truth and love. And gaining this depth we enjoy a blessed stability and peace. We are not anxious then to be placed in propitious circumstances; our higher life is independent of circumstances. We are no longer moved by every wind of doctrine, nor captivated by each new fashion, nor perplexed by the latest sceptical theory, nor staggered by the strange trial and temptation. The life and glory of the Alpine flower are safe because the plant has laid hold of secret places in the cleft of the rock; and the

Christian life is strong and stable hidden with Christ in God.

There is a growth in *breadth*: "His branches shall spread." There is spreading of roots and of boughs. Not unusually we commence the spiritual life with narrow and ignorant views of the divine character and government; but justly cultured, the soul expands in the knowledge and love of God. Says the immature, untaught Christian, Why does God afflict me like this? what have I done that He should treat me thus rudely? And he urges fifty other foolish questions and complaints. A true believer, however, has the capacity of growth, and comes to take wider and truer views of God's character and ways. "When I was a child, I thought as a child, I reasoned as a child, I spake as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things," is a passage as true of the spiritual life as it is of the natural. How little some grow in this larger knowledge of Christ! We marvel at a man's ignorance of history when he asks whether Shakespeare is still living, at his ignorance of astronomy when he thinks that the stars are only a few miles away, at his ignorance of geography when he counts a continent an island; but Christians express views equally strange about the ways of God and the spiritual life. We sorely

need to grow out of all narrow and unworthy misconceptions. There is also a growth in charity, a growth in heart, as well as in intelligence. Writing to a friend, Wesley says, "The longer I live, the larger allowances I make for human infirmities. I exact more from myself, and less from others." What a true sign of growth! A man is spiritually a thousand years old who sincerely writes like that. The finest branches belonging to a garden are those that run over the wall—that run over the limits of self, the boundary of our habitation, our denominational palisade, our city walls. The growth in kindness, sympathy, and catholicity is the divinest growth.

There is a growth in *beauty*: "His beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon." Mount Lebanon is decked with loveliness, and it has an abundance of aromatic things and odoriferous flowers. So increasing gracefulness, attractiveness, and charm mark those who go on to perfection. There is something special about the beauty of the olive; it has a charm of its own. The beauty of many trees arrests attention and compels admiration forthwith. The palm at once impresses by its elegance, the apple-tree by its blossoms, the orange-tree by its golden fruit and unique fragrance, the tulip-tree by its gorgeous flowers; the olive, however, is by no means pictur-

esque—as Leo Grindon says, it oftentimes looks even stunted and shabby. In our greenhouses and conservatories it is rare, a circumstance manifestly attributable to its want of the gay features of the fuchsia and camellia. But the soft, delicate beauty of the olive grows upon you, until, stirred by the wind, the shimmering silver of its leaves makes a picture. You then see why it has been a favourite with the poets. So Christian character is often not in the least brilliant, heroic, or striking. The noblest men and women are modest, homely, simple souls; yet they reveal a mild and serious grace which is in truth the perfection of beauty. In this unconscious winsomeness we ought to grow unto our lives' end.

There is a growth in *usefulness*: "They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon." What corn and wine are to men, the children of God are to the world—they diffuse life and gladness. Their faith, sympathy, counsel, and gifts become the inspiration, light, leading, and solacement of their neighbours. This service is the very glory of the Christian. Some men closely resemble the bitter roots and poisonous fruits of nature—their whole influence is baneful. Others exist for merely selfish ends; their entire life being absorbed in their

own indulgence and aggrandisement, as certain egoistic plants and trees fight for the possession of every bit of space, light, and moisture. Many more are bent only on vanity and pride, as the worthless ragwort sports itself in gold and the poppy clothes itself with crimson. But the glory of the Christian is that he lives to bless. A true Church is a field of golden corn, through which the Saviour walks, and by the magic of His blessing it feeds thousands; such a Church is a loaded branch in the true Vine, refreshing many lips with its clusters of celestial virtue, and making many hearts to sing for joy. In this usefulness we ought to grow. It is a mistake to suppose that the lapse of time impairs a man's power of usefulness. If we live fully devoted to God, we are ever gathering power and ripeness, and are being fitted for the more effectual service of our generation.

"I will be as the dew unto Israel." These words, standing at the beginning of this passage, solve the whole difficulty. We are confused and dismayed when called upon to attain and exhibit these high perfections, yet all is easy enough in the light of this sweet promise. The garden might be bewildered if it were told at the beginning of the year of all that was expected from it—all wealth of colour, the daily incense of morning, noon, and night, the delicate essence for the bee,

a thousand forms of beauty and manifold fruits in the circling seasons; but its task is ended and its fears are dissolved when once it submits to the royal influences of the sky. So we need only put ourselves under this gracious promise. Everything is possible in the power of grace, as all beauty and fruitfulness are possible in the dew-drop. In silent and secluded hours let us muse and pray until our soul is full of the heavenly dew, and our character and life shall lack no good thing. "I will be as the dew unto Israel." Everything is simple and easy in that glorious fact. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, *who also will do it.*"

XXXV

INFLUENCE

Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. — Sol-Song, iv. 16.

"One of the most mysterious elements of flowers is the perfume, the essential action of which in plant life cannot be demonstrated by the wisest of our scientific men. Gas can be weighed, but not scent. The smallest known insect that lives in the heart of a rose can be caught by a microscope-lens and made to give up the secret of its organisation, but what it is that the warm summer brings us from the wild flowers of the hillsides or wafts to us from the choice exotics of the hothouse no man has been able to determine. So fine, so subtle, so imponderable, it eludes weights and measures."

Does not this subtle fragrance remind us of the strange, sweet influence that distils from genuine souls? No one can exactly understand this influence; it defies explanation. Unlike speech that can be heard, gifts which can be estimated, acts

that appeal to the senses, or conduct whose features may be described, influence is altogether etherea. and illusive; yet it is a fact, and one of the most delightful of facts. It is almost impossible to write a biography of some of the very choicest of God's children. They have charmed, helped, and inspired us, moulded our character, deeply influenced us for good, made it possible for us to believe in the highest ideals, and yet when we sit down with love and reverence to give an account of them we are quite at a loss what to set down. The biographer lacks material; yes, *material*, just that, the greatest fact in life being the *immaterial*. We cannot describe the scent of the sweet-briar, paint the odour of the rose, take a photograph of the sweet smell of a field that the Lord has blessed, or track through the air the pervasive breath of pink and carnation, of violet and primrose; neither can we write a memoir of some of the most delightful and influential of saints. Lives of very little real importance sometimes furnish incidents enough to fill a big book, whilst all that is interesting touching a multitude of brave and gracious men and women easily goes into a single page, just as the smallest phial contains the essence of ten thousand roses.

Many Christians are really and eminently serving the cause of God by simply diffusing the sweet

influences of true, consecrated character. They cannot fill responsible office, play a prominent part, or effect anything worthy of record; yet they charm and bless all about them as the flower of the field diffuses vitality and health. Their smell is as Lebanon, that is all. Yet how much this virtue shed on the desert air means! Example that has no voice, the commonplace deed that secures no chronicle, the personal magnetism that defies analysis—these are precious, silent forces making for righteousness. No philosophy can explain the mysterious elements of Christian influence; but such influence is the supreme force working in society for its purification and uplifting. Let us aim at the sincerest, deepest, purest personal life, and we shall bless the world more than we think: we shall, unperceived by ourselves, be enriching it all day long with the ethers of heaven.

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